A MARRYING MAN

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G. B. STERN

A MARRYING MAN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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TWOS AND THREES
GRAND CHAIN

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A MARRYING MAN

BY

G. B. STERN

Lady Tomlyn

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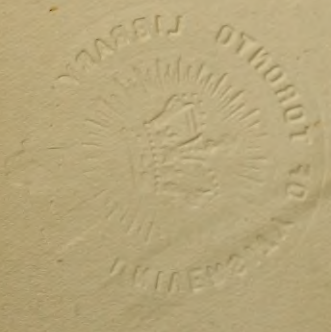

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TO

OLIVE WADSLEY

CONTENTS

PART I

PAGE

CHAPTER I. 1

CHAPTER II. 21

PART II

CHAPTER I. 39

CHAPTER II. 54

CHAPTER III. 67

CHAPTER IV. 81

CHAPTER V. 103

CHAPTER VI. 121

CHAPTER VII. 145

PART III

CHAPTER I. 162

CHAPTER II. 176

CHAPTER III. 203

PART IV

CHAPTER I. 249

CHAPTER II. 269

CHAPTER III. 288

CHAPTER IV. 306

A MARRYING MAN

PART I

CHAPTER I

KATHLEEN MORRISON, on her return to London, was not prepared for the empty, echoing house, the loud thud of her footsteps on the uncarpeted stairs, the ghostly appearance of the linen-shrouded furniture. Her brother and sister-in-law, with whom she made her home, usually abandoned the seaside towards the end of August; these were already the first days of September.

"Not before Tuesday week, Miss Kathleen," the one resentful housemaid-in-charge answered her enquiries; "the Missus said she'd written to you."

She had. Many times. But Kathleen, having once sent an assurance of her safety, together with a brief explanation of the circumstances of her escapade, very carefully refrained from opening the letters that came in reply. Not that family disapproval would for an instant have turned her from a decision to remain at least a month in Alpenruh; but the month itself was so strangely

and perfectly apart from the sounding discordances of before and after, that she refused to mar its harmony by the possibility of a single jarring note. So the envelopes addressed in Edward's handwriting, and in Nelly's handwriting, accumulated in a neat little pile. Doubtless they contained "home-truths." Kathleen promised herself a careful perusal of these on the ensuing New Year's Eve, when from previous experience she anticipated a fit of depression so intense that nothing could possibly serve to augment it. Meanwhile, she was glad to find that Edward and Nelly, and Nelly's father, old Mr. Jeyne, and Nelly's two children, Muriel and Nicolas, and Nelly's nurse, and Nelly's cook, were still absent from the house in North Kensington.

The house was high and narrow-breasted, situated in a neighbourhood which, whatever the generation, had been fashionable with the generation before, so that its inhabitants mainly consisted of ghosts and grumblers. The grumblers were of the kind who religiously take their five weeks' holiday in the summer, and are firmly imbued with the immorality of leaving their homes at any other period of the year. Therefore North Kensington was now a deserted wilderness of drawn blinds and white-smocked house-painters, of spectral scaffoldings and forlornly prowling cats. The milkman's was an eerie cry at dawn; and at eve the German band blared mournfully to unresponsive areas. Kathleen trod softly from one empty room to another; was given her meals at eccentric hours, in unfamiliar parts of the house;

shivered a little as she locked her front door at nights—how stiff they were, those bolts! and with what startling clangour they shot at last into their sockets!—and was wonderfully at peace. With a present entirely negative, with a future carefully unglanced at, she was free amidst the prevailing spells of silence to yield herself entirely to a memory still so fresh and near that it asked to be re-lived, caressed and handled, laid to sleep for the pleasure of bidding it wake again. Idly she wondered why it was that she did not miss Gareth more poignantly; why she was content to believe their idyll wholly a gift of thirty-one days which haphazard had capriciously flung them, that hot oily afternoon, on the wharf at Folkestone. . . .

In company with Fräulein Gerhardt and Mademoiselle Lefranc, she had been shepherding a party of seven schoolgirls on an instructive trip to Switzerland. Gareth Albert Temple was one of the Society of Young Botanists, touring the Alps in search of specimens. And they had both missed the boat. . . .

Thereafter, a headlong chase together across Europe in quest of their separate parties. A growing intimacy—"You must let me be of any assistance I can on your journey," the boy had remarked in his gentle courtly manner. He was not more than twenty-four; and good to look upon, with his wavy black hair and pleading dark eyes; eyes that were the only contradiction in a face compounded of strong curves, firm jaw and determined mouth and outjutting squarely-formed

eyebrows. . . . Kathleen smiled tenderly enough at memory of his straight young comeliness. And was it incapacity or merely laziness on his part which had caused all the practical management of that fantastic continental scamper to lapse into her hands ? management of times and trains and meals and foreign money and luggage at the Customs ? . . . But she was accustomed to leadership, and she found a rare sweetness in Gareth's admiration of her competence ; admiration which he mingled with an old-world romantic deference to a certain element of innocent and unprotected maidenhood which his upbringing seemed to take for granted even in a schoolmistress in her twenty-seventh year.

Twenty-seven !—and this was still the period of the late eighteen-nineties, when girlhood ended abruptly at thirty ; when middle-age was supposed to begin at forty ; and the intervening years were for the unmarried to learn their lesson of quiet resignation. Twenty-seven !—Kathleen was clutching hot-fingered at the moments, lest she should be left with empty hands. And the days ate at the years . . . and she was going abroad in the company of nine females and the spirit of discontent.

. . . Gradually, a fretful eagerness to join up with her party, merged into a mischievous eagerness to avoid doing so ; to prolong a little while, though by cheating and stealth, the charm of travelling a woman with a man by her side, as nature and tradition demanded. Folly, perhaps ; but the sort of folly of which a girl—a very young

and silly girl—would be capable. . . . As proof of her own capacity for such youth and folly, Kathleen welcomed the impulse ; encouraged it. And then, just as it seemed impossible to stave off any longer the encounter with duty and discipline, fate had aided her with a genuine accident by which they had been shoved late on a rain-misted evening into the wrong train at the little Alpine station, and had been carried off to Alpenruh, instead of to Lauterbrunnen in the opposite direction ; and had been forced to spend the night at the gold-brown châlet hotel. And the next morning was washed in vivid blue and sunshine ; the snowy mountain peaks called for repetition of the thunderous saga of their names : Schreckhorn, Faulhorn, Wetterhorn, Finsteraarhorn ! . . . And the tinkle of ascending cowbells among the mountains, ducted with the musical plash of cascade and rivulet ; the mules champed and flicked their tails in the winding village street ; the guides sat comfortably astride of the wall, and surveyed the round rickety tables outside the cafés, the bundles of walking-sticks and chamois-heads so prodigally displayed for sale ; the pines wafted their resinous fragrance through the green-shuttered windows of the hotel ; and down the polished wooden stairs, Gareth was awaiting her, and clear yellow honey for breakfast. . . . It was not a morning even to think of Fräulein Gerhardt and Mademoiselle Lefranc, and Elsie and Gwendolen and Kitty and Beatrice and Dora and Flo and Mary, doubtless angrily bewildered at this desertion of the English history and arithmetic teacher.

But Gareth had pleaded: "Let us stay here—just for to-day. . . ."

Presently he confessed that on the latter part of their journey he had been taking the utmost care to avoid catching up with the Society of Young Botanists. Once he had even caught sight of them. . . .

"I couldn't bear to end our good time. Can you forgive me for dragging you into this?"

Kathleen smiled—but made no counter confession. She let him think he was responsible for their daring escapade, because she was twenty-seven, and he twenty-four, and it gave him a fearful pleasure to think so.

Thus the affair had begun. Was she wrong in letting it take its course? Plenty of leisure now to regret, if regret were to be her portion.

No. . . . She was glad they had lingered on at Alpenruh; even when the brilliant fever of her youth at its zenith, the flame of reds and browns which she had inherited from an Indian grandmother, from whom had also been bequeathed her noiseless walk and the streak of buried fierceness in her nature, even when all this had rushed Gareth past all dreaming chivalry to a passion of strictly chivalrous adoration—even then she did not regret, in retrospect, having provided herself with this fortified memory against all future bitterness of self-reproach for wasting the years.

She did not for a second doubt that the episode was definitely at an end, and laid aside. Certainly, at parting, Gareth's hand had sought to detain

hers in a lingering clasp; but beyond the actual "Good-bye, Kathleen," he had not put into words any desire to prolong the play after the curtain had fallen. Nor had she known till the present, how serenely one can dwell in the mellow afterglow of happiness, though summer be drawing to its end in the railinged squares of North Kensington.

A letter arrived, in Gareth's boldly uncharacteristic caligraphy. She withdrew the sheets lovingly enough from their envelope, as the postman's clattering passage retreated down the street.

"I want to thank you," thus the missive ran. "And I want to do it largely and wonderfully, with an effect of shouts and clarion-calls and crashing thunders, in case you should not understand how big a thing in my life our holiday together has been. And I want to do it delicately, in miniature, with a fairy paint-box, and a flute of reeds, and single raindrops pattering, that you may see how each separate second of your company was in itself perfection. But with all this, I can only just write 'thank you' with sober pen and ink, on plain white paper. And because it is you, you will know.

"Our holiday—yes, but I shall speak the word now according to its derivation: 'holy day.' Holy days, for us, Kathleen!

"I am shutting my eyes—which is why the lines have run crooked—and I can see the silly little wooden ink-pot châlets, the sun striping across the pink pine-stems, the foam and tumble

of seven white cascades down the mountainside. I shall always see it ; you have dowered the beggar-man richly, queen Kathleen. " GARETH."

The girl perused the quaint, rather formal sentences, with the feeling that just this was needed still to round off the incident completely. He had spoilt nothing, had sweetened still further the aftermath, and added to its fragrance. Well-pleased, she would have replaced the sheets in their envelope, when she noticed that she had overlooked on the last page yet another scribbled line ; a postscript :

" When may I see you again ?—G.A.D."

And suddenly the human man sprang alive to her. How often she had heard him putting the very same question ; how often smiled at the absurd kink in his nature it revealed, a queer incapacity to take leave of her, be it for ever so slight a period of time, without the eager question : " When shall I see you again ? When ? Where ? How ? " . . . Seeking always to let one meeting overlap the next ; no trust in chance or in management. " When shall I see you again ? " The one phrase touched a spring that set free a whole warm gush of recollections. Of course he should see her again ! She was impatient for his coming, wrote to him instantly a summons to visit her the very next evening.

At the far end of the dark narrow hall, was an outjutting ledge, hidden from view by the staircase. It was seated here that Kathleen awaited him, the expectant fire in her red-brown eyes

quenched by the sombre lighting, her feet drumming impatiently against the wall, as she wondered if Gareth in North Kensington would be very different from Gareth in Alpenruh. She was guiltily conscious of having slipped on evening-dress, something soft and clinging in moss-green. Glad, too, that Nelly was not present to comment on the fact.

It was an exciting vigil, listening for the crunch of footsteps, the sharp peal of the bell which would scatter stillness. And all her knowledge of its approach did not prevent a quick jump in her heart at the actual happening. Then she sat motionless, thinking of him on the other side of the door. Presently, muttering to herself, the disagreeable housemaid-in-charge opened to the visitor.

"Is Miss Morrison at home?"

"Yes, sir." Hannah left him standing while she departed in search. Then, with a leap and a laugh, Kathleen was before him.

"Isn't this fun?" She was radiant against her dull umber background. "Gareth, why don't you say something? Come in here."

"Here" was Edward's study, with swathed chairs, and chandeliers draped in a sheet. Kathleen had lit a pair of candles, but in the semi-obscurity he could form no impression of his surroundings. It might have been any house, anywhere. But he had a sensation that he ought to speak in whispers.

"Are you alone here?" and wondered whether, under those circumstances, he did not do wrong

in coming? Which was absurd, considering Alpenruh. But North Kensington was different.

Before many minutes, she saw that he intended asking her to marry him, and rather feverishly sought to ward it off. The hushed room was a trap now, and the moss-green evening-gown an added menace. Gareth, quietly persistent, dodged all her bright and chatty openings, and succeeded at last in putting the question she dreaded.

"Will you, Kathleen?"

"Gareth, how do you see marriage?"

Astonished, he replied: "With you? As a fire-lit dream-come-true."

"Not with me. With anyone."

He drew her a series of charming, conventional pictures, steeped in a ruddy glow from the hearth of illusions; a child's laugh, a sundial in a garden, the flicker of lamplight on shelves of books, as needful accessories. He also mentioned, rather shyly, the illuminating spirit of love to lurk beneath outward trivialities; the joy of sharing evil and good alike; the flaming interest to be taken in each other's work, whatever that might chance to be. And he spoke of two as the only magical number in arithmetic; and threw in a Persian cat, to boot. And was silent. He had spoken earnestly and well; eloquence was at all times his strong point.

"Gareth."

"Yes, dear?"

"Do you care to know how I have learnt to see marriage?"

Gareth, in anticipation of his disclosure, shrank from it.

"Oh—please," he said. She mistook the appeal for assent.

"It's a clammy state of familiarity," thus Kathleen defied his fair visions; "familiarity of petty outward things that don't count. Breakfast-table intimacy, with the yolk from an eaten egg smeared yellow on the shell. Intimacy of letters: 'Who's your correspondent?' 'Who are you writing to?' Moving in lumps, undetachable, sticky; waiting about in the hall, and calling irritably up the stairs to know if the other will be long, instead of just—going. It's the shedding of all privacy; bursting into rooms without knocking: Thy room shall be my room! It's to hear a man's bath-water running in the morning, and to know exactly, by sounds, when he gets in and out. To be aware how many shirts he uses per week, because you count his dirty washing. Oh, if I loved a man, I shouldn't yearn for 'the tender privilege of darning his dear socks!' Rather keep him for ever remote, with the mystery still on him. But marriage offers the sight of unmade beds, use of the same piece of soap, pilgrimages to the same friends, the same question every evening: 'What have you been doing all day?' answer to be given in detail. Oh, Gareth, I'm sorry, I'm sorry; your pictures were ever so much prettier, but mine are true."

She paused for response. But the meaning of her tirade had percolated Gareth's mist-bound understanding not a whit. The outburst in itself

struck him as harsh and ugly, quite out of keeping with the spirit in which a maiden should receive a declaration of love. She was spoiling something; petulantly he refused to recognize the necessity for its spoiling.

So he made no reply. And less vehemently she went on:

"You mustn't think that all this is because I'm cooped up with an unfortunate example. My brother and his wife are very fond of each other; what the neighbours would call an ideal pair. They see nothing of what I'm telling you; why should they? They're doing it all the time. But it's a mistake to be a perpetual onlooker at marriage when the couple are still young and in the throes. One's mother and father are different; one doesn't regard them as married, merely as parents. But I've lived most of my life a third in a family of three, and been robbed of the—glamour, you would call it, without getting anything in exchange, except a horror of wedded bliss, an utter horror of it. You mustn't ask me to be your wife, Gareth, because I'd be afraid; afraid of all that might happen to you and me; afraid, most of all, of seeing it happen."

. . . . . .

The enshrouding linen draperies were removed from the house in North Kensington, revealing a taste for furnishing of which the governing principle had obviously been: "Here is a space—fill it!"

For Mrs. Edward Morrison had written, announcing the return of the family:

"We shall be back on Tuesday in time for supper. It must be awful for you alone in the empty house—especially now!"

Then a few advance orders respecting milk to be taken in, and a chicken to be roasted; an ecstatic description of Nicolas in bathing-drawers; and "Your loving sister, Nelly."

There were only two words in the epistle which contained matter for reflection: "especially now." . . .

Kathleen spent profitably her remaining days of golden solitude in visualizing the long weeks and months to come, when she could no more enter a room with the comfortable security of finding it untenanted.

For soon the Winter-fear would find her out.

An old enemy; she knew it well. It came, inevitable, monotonous, with the fall of the first leaf, the flicker of the first fire. "It's not warm enough for Nicolas without a coat," said Nelly; that was one of the heralds. There were many others. Always it came. The waiting for it was almost the worst. Winter-fear . . . oh, the furious beating clenched resentment, resentment of a thousand Indian forefathers, that Kathleen harboured against the creeping cold. Cold that bit. Cold that gnawed. Cold that ached.

Winter-fear brought a special horror to the house in North Kensington. Concentration. Nelly, liberal enough in most matters, had, like all housewives, a special kink; she economized in coals. Except in cases of illness, in the dining-room only was a fire kept alight. And slowly, day

by day, as the increasing cold drove them inwards, the entire family concentrated round this fire. Here they worked and read and talked and ate, huddled together in the semicircle of warmth. Kathleen, in an occasional frantic longing for solitude, would break away; retire to her chilly bedroom or to the raw streets, both harbours of refuge in the summer months. Always, numbed to the bone, she was compelled to surrender, return to the dining-room community—till April with soft warm fingers should come to release her.

A minor horror called cold-in-the-head. Nicolas, by three ominous sneezes, would give the sign; following which, every member of the household was stricken in turn, or in chorus; sometimes a solitary sufferer; sometimes a veritable orchestra of coughs and sniffs and trumpetings and throat-clearings. The talk would be all of handkerchiefs and the lack of hot water; and the faces round the dining-room fire would swell into a circle of grotesque caricatures, blotched, and red-eyed, and hideous. No respite, none! and seven long months of it to be faced.

"... We shall be back on Tuesday"—and already the ghost of Nelly was calling over the banisters for someone to fasten her frock—how the hooks would persist in catching those irritating stray hairs at the back of the neck! Already Edward was turning on the bath-taps; Muriel practising for two hours after tea; Nicolas spurting affection with a jammy mouth. Thus the members of her family, when they finally did return, were by anticipation distorted from quite ordinary

figures to horrible marionettes whose slightest action set every nerve itching.

"Well, Katty dear," affectionately Nelly embraced her sister-in-law in the hall, calling her by the name most disliked; "here we are, you see."

Kathleen did see.

She saw also that Edward avoided her eyes, and that Nelly was nervous; while Muriel, aged nine, regarded her aunt curiously, as having been for many meals past the object of horrified conversation on the part of the elders.

Nicolas alone seemed unaware of any tension in the atmosphere. Up the stairs he staggered, a miniature Falstaff; laden to the ground by the burden of his own flesh, and, in addition, an iron spade, a wooden spade, a fishing-net, and two tin pails; relics of summer joys that were fled. Kathleen went to his assistance, listening sympathetically to his breathless explanations of how he *wouldn't* leave them behind for the landlady's little girl; Kathleen gathered that the landlady's little girl had always cast an eye of appropriation on that iron spade.

"An' I said: 'You won't have it, never!' An' I hit her knees wiv it." Nicolas collapsed triumphantly on the nursery floor; he was evidently a firm believer in the methods of the cave-man.

Kathleen rather liked Nicolas, despite jamminess. His years were five, and his voice was fat. When poked, he gurgled. Once indeed she had been moved to embrace him tenderly, to which moment his mother had unfortunately been wit-

ness. Kathleen's subsequent existence was spent in striving to correct the misapprehension that she possessed the maternal instinct. Nicolas had to suffer.

On the other hand, Muriel was no favourite. There was that small matter of practising to account for it ; still more, the fact that she was a younger pupil at the establishment where her aunt was installed as teacher of history and arithmetic. From the schoolgirl point of view, this latter condition of things opened up vast fields of thought. Muriel, very neat about the legs and mind, was particularly concerned with the ethics of the situation. To be intimately connected with Authority was an awkwardness to which none of her mates were exposed, and involved a special code of law.

Was it a matter to be bragged about, for instance, or relegated to a shamed obscurity ? What was the precise moment every day when careless familiarity must yield to awed respect, and vice versa ? Was she justified in selling (for J nibs) details of Kathleen's home existence to Kathleen's infatuated adorers ? Or did this come under the category of " hateful mean ? " How could one avoid walking to school in company with Authority, when she and Authority left the same house at the same moment, bound in the same direction ? In what spirit was punishment to be received, when she who punished had that morning been reprimanded before one's very eyes, for Encouraging the Cat ? Above all, what was the good of striving for the first place in an exam. when you know jolly

well it will be denied you—"for fear of being accused of showing favouritism"?

Muriel pondered a great deal on all this. She was an earnest child.

The prevailing attitude of condemnation-kindly-suspended-till-after-meals was responsible for a certain amount of strain at the first reunion of "happy family" round the supper-table. Nelly talked a great deal of their holiday in Felixstowe, and not at all of Kathleen's holiday in Alpenruh. And Edward again proved his claim to the old and ancient order of Salt-cellar Strategists, by fighting out an entire minor campaign then raging in the Balkans, with the simple aid of a cruet-stand, two knives, a spoon, a fork, a spreading stain of mulberry juice ("This is Albania, d'you see, Nelly?") and the sauce-boat. There was no topic of the hour that Edward could not illustrate with the assistance of these homely vessels, be the subject of his demonstration a railway accident, a mechanical invention, or the defence of Troy.

Having annihilated Montenegro and the chicken at the same time, he pushed back his chair, and remarked ponderously: "I should like a few minutes with you in the study, Kath, if you're not too busy."

"... Well?" Nelly queried eagerly, half an hour later, on finding her husband alone.

"Can't make head or tail of it," said Edward, very angry. "Either Kath is mad or I am."

Nelly supplied the necessary assurances.

"Well, but she says she won't marry him. Now what do you think of that?" The question was a

mere form; Edward was aware what his wife thought of "that," and of everything else; to which satisfactory state of things might be attributed his domestic happiness.

"I've been very tactful," continued the head of the house; "very tactful and very lenient. I'm broad-minded, as you know."

"Yes. So am I, of course. But, Neddy, you must have bullied her. And you promised not to. Remember," and Nelly lowered her face, "she hasn't got a mother."

"Nor have I," crossly. "The same mother. That by no means explains her extraordinary statement that she doesn't want to marry this fellow who has"—he hesitated between "compromised" and "seduced," then discarded both in favour of—"led her astray."

"And a nice sort of a blackguard he must be," added indignant brotherhood. "Not want to marry him indeed! I should like to know why?" unconscious of anything contradictory in his explosive phrases.

But enlightenment had visited his wife, and her eyes brimmed with tears.

"Oh, poor Katty . . . poor darling! I must go to her at once. Neddy, can't you see——" She paused on her hurrying mission of comfort to fling an aphorism of unwonted daring and brilliance at the head of her liege lord.

"It takes two to make a pair," said Nelly, and departed.

Slowly Edward Morrison grasped her meaning. Slowly, too, he grasped the fact that here was a

perfectly unsubtle problem, to be attacked with a delightfully simple weapon—the horsewhip. And the soul of Edward Morrison was glad within him. That his sister should have sinned was terrible indeed; but not so terrible as that his sister should have new-fangled notions.

"'Pon my word, Nelly is a remarkable woman!"

The remarkable woman was at the moment mounting the stairs towards the bedrooms. Nelly Morrison, when unwed, had been known as the "Belle of Clapton," which over and beyond its reminiscence of pleasure-steamer, had also had a deteriorating effect upon her brains. Otherwise, she was a good-natured little soul, genuinely fond of her sister-in-law, and very anxious always that Kathleen should "feel that this is really her home." In furtherance of which desire, it was her habit to make Kathleen's room bright with flowers; flowers everywhere, on the dressing-table, amongst the ink and pens, on the window-sills, in the washstand-basin. She held now in her hand some half-wilted marguerites, symbols of comfort about as adequate as her husband's contemplated horsewhip of righteousness.

The room was in darkness when Nelly entered on tiptoe—and without knocking:

"Katty, are you in bed?"

Kathleen did not reply; drew the sheet close up to her burning cheeks. What a mess, what an unendurable mess these people were making of her days of enchantment. Perhaps if she did not move, Nelly would think her asleep, and go away.

But a slight catch in the breath betrayed her wakefulness.

Nelly groped her way to the bed; felt for the other's hand.

"Katty, are you crying?"

No answer.

"Katty dear, won't he marry you? Is that it? Oh, Katty, I'm so sorry. . . ."

CHAPTER II

"I LOOKED on you as a youngster up till now," Mr. Temple said. He did not explain what were the circumstances which had shocked him into a change of opinion; but went on, in the heavy paternal voice: "You've got to shove your way, my lad. You've been playing at life; university education, and books and travel and this and that . . . I've spoilt you. No wonder your father's business wasn't good enough for you. Well—I'm not a tyrant; I raised no objections to your starting on the architect line instead. But that wasn't good enough either—though goodness knows you talked enough about the responsibility of turning cities into things of beauty and form . . ." He broke off: "And now here you are!"

"'Not architect, artist, nor man!'" Gareth misquoted from the immortal Pecksniff.

Mr. Temple could not repress a smile of recognition. Dickens was cultivated, read aloud, assiduously, in the large handsome parlour above the chemist's shop at Paddington. Chemist's establishment, or dispensary, Mr. Temple would have preferred it to be called. For he was a chemist of a most refined and superior order, and employed two assistants and a boy; nor was the shop on the street-level, but up a broad flight of

stone steps, indicated by a single ruby lamp at their base; which caused Mr. Temple the occasional illusion that he was a surgeon. He might with equal reason have thought himself a signalman.

Nevertheless, if Gareth imagined that by so simple an expedient as the mention of his father's favourite author, he could divert the threatened lecture on his own misdoings, he was mistaken. On receipt of a letter from William Payne, President of the Society of Young Botanists, officially announcing that Gareth had abandoned his holiday with the S.Y.B., in order to spend a month in sole company of a young female, Mr. Temple had at first been inclined to secret pride at his only son's first sowing of this very gentlemanly wild oat. He had discussed the matter with his wife—with considerable delicacy, be sure; for he could never quite forget that she was a gentlewoman, and above him in station: Miss Lucy Jamieson, before he had married her; governess to a family of consequence in the sleepy little country town where he had first "practised" before coming to London. Her opinions, therefore, influenced him more than he was prepared to acknowledge. And his present reproaches were the direct outcome of his change of mental attitude: If my son is old enough to incur responsibilities, he is old enough to be in a material position to discharge them. . . .

"You'll come into all the money later on. 'Tisn't that I grudge your allowance, either. But I want to see what stuff you're made of."

"I don't believe I'm made of any stuff," Gareth confessed desperately.

Mr. Temple planted his hands deep in his pockets, and surveyed his offspring with disapproval.

"There's no room in the world for shirkers. The world wants men. You've had things made too easy. The world wants you to stand on your own legs, not on your father's shoulders. It's the law of the world that the weakest go to the wall and the strongest come out on top."

Gareth began to hate the world, as represented by his father's weighty platitudes. Not for one instant did he attempt to storm the barricade of years, and force his own point of view upon the old gentleman's reluctant sight. The remainder of the lecture rendered the fact patent that it henceforth devolved upon him to renounce his dreaming peace, his glamorous aspirations, and to do battle with the universe. . . . How he wished he had been a girl, and thus absolved from such duty.

And yet he had met girls by the score who had wanted to be men. Men!—the thickness of their understanding; the dense fibres they put out, without one sensitive tingle. . . . "You've got to shove your way, my lad!"—there it was again, his father's pet catch-phrase. It was hideous and hot—to shove. Oh, the hush and coolness and harmony of the woman's part; she might enjoy colours, and soft materials, and dreams, tears even, without a reproach. And when love came along, the wonder of being besieged and of yielding. . . . Someone afterwards and always, to clear her way, give her leisure and firelight. And suddenly came a vision of Kathleen with a blade in her hand that

flashed this way and that, while she cut a path through the world, for him to tread in her wake. . . .

The vision passed. But so intent had he been on it, that he missed his father's final hint of what was expected of him with regard to his recent conduct, on which, since his return from Switzerland, a discreet silence had been preserved. "We'll talk of that later on, when you've found your feet a bit!"

Gareth carried his aggrievements and his visions in a confused heap to the parlour, where he knew his mother would at this time be sitting, with her knitting in the lap of her smoke-grey silk dress, while she waited for Jane to draw the blinds and trim the wicks. He had an affection for the Confidence Hour, when the lamplighter was on his magical round, and Mr. Temple still busy in the dispensary below; an affection that dated from the days of his early childhood; when she would tell long sweet stirring tales from the "Idylls of the King" to a little round-eyed boy as yet unprotected by the dawn of reason. His very name he owed to a gentle fervour on her part for all matters appertaining to the Poet Laureate, and to chivalry, and to the Knights of Arthur's Round Table. It had been her wont to name him, half playfully, half wistfully, her "youngest knight." . . . Glancing across at his absorbed face, she wondered now how many of her teachings could be relied on at this crisis to bear fruit.

"Gareth, when are you going to bring my new daughter home to me?"

He smiled, amused at the suddenness of her

onslaught upon his reverie. "Mother dear, what on earth do you mean?"

"Don't you think it time, my boy, that you told me all about it?" She held out a tentative hand; a very white and delicate hand, half covered by the falling lace ruffles of her sleeve; on her bright brown hair she wore a lace cap to match the ruffles; and at her throat a round cameo brooch secured the fleecy white shawl. Mrs. Temple was very pleasant to look upon; and her soft voice fell soothingly upon Gareth's hearing, jarred by his father's ponderous repetitions. He crossed the room, and seated himself upon the arm of her chair; while he played with her ball of knitting-silk.

"Do you want me to tell you about . . . Kathleen, mother?"

"Is she pretty?" cunningly drawing him out. "I once had a pupil called Kathleen; she was Irish, and had blue eyes and black hair. Has *your* Kathleen blue eyes?" Purposely she leant rich stress on the possessive pronoun; he must be made to feel from the start that she did not regard the girl from the traditional mother's standpoint of "designing female," but with the deeper tenderness that is bred of understanding. She could trust her boy to love wisely even when he had acted foolishly.

Gareth tried to visualize Kathleen on the occasion most vivid to his memory, when flushed and radiant she had sprung before him from the gloomy passage of the house in North Kensington.

"Her eyes are dark," he said at length, slowly.

"Not hard darkness, you know, but the brown of water in heavy shadow; and the brows are very close above them. She walks as if her feet were bare. Her skin is lovely, rich dusky colours, olive and geranium red." This last, mindful of his mother's weak point: "A true lady, Gareth, is always particular about her complexion and hands."

Bit by bit, led by artfully inserted queries, he related the whole chain of events; throwing in also as much as he knew of Kathleen's birth, relations, and conditions of life generally. He did not mention his visit to North Kensington.

"Go on, dear."

"There's no more to say, mother."

"Yes, Gareth, there is something more." Suddenly her tones rang out clear and accusing: "I'm waiting to hear that you are prepared to make the poor girl your wife."

Gareth was stricken dumb at thus finding himself thrust into the rôle of villain and betrayer. Before he could sufficiently collect himself for speech, Mrs. Temple went on, her voice trembling a little in genuine emotion:

"Oh, my dear, my dear, I know how it is with you; you are growing into a man with a man's ideas. Your companions have been telling you that chivalry is 'played out,' food only for old women and romantic girls and molly-coddles. Believe me, dear, it isn't so. Chivalry and honour are not weaknesses to be ashamed of. They are what in the olden days made a knight strongest: strong in battle, strong in love. Oh, Gareth, there

are so many in the world to help a woman's tears to flow; don't join their ranks. Don't take up with this modern poisonous notion of living only for the gratification of the . . . senses——" The white unwrinkled cheeks of the speaker blushed a faint rose at this use of a word offensive to her. "Have you forgotten the tales I used to tell you? Of Arthur and his queen; of Pelleas and Ettarre; Galahad, the maiden knight, the quest of Percivale; Launcelot and Elaine. Little son, these legends and songs are valuable only for their symbolic meaning. A damsel on a charger, a knight supporting her with his arm, the spirit of the picture exists equally without the steed and armour. And when you are an old white-haired man, my darling, I want you to be able to say, 'God helping me, I have never wronged a woman that I did not strive to put it right.' How are you to speak those words when the poor frightened child who loved you only too well, is left to fight her battles alone? There is only one way of righting that wrong, Gareth; and the way lies through a golden wedding-ring."

Gareth could not suppress a faint stirring of amusement at the fancy portrait of Kathleen's timorous anguish. But at the same time, he was genuinely touched and stirred by his mother's generous pleadings, by the tears he saw dimming her usually placid eyes.

Slipping an affectionate arm around her shoulders: "Mother dear," he said; "look at me—straight up at me. That's right. I've wronged no one, do you understand? I'm not

that sort of fellow, thanks to you. I *have* asked Kathleen to be my wife. She refused."

"Refused?" incredulously.

"Yes."

"Impossible."

Mrs. Temple, outwardly so malleable, was a determined little woman, and once her brain struck out on a certain line it was a matter of some difficulty to divert it. Gareth made an effort.

"You see, mother, she's not at all the sort of silly helpless girl you imagine her. She knew what she was doing. She's free, and—and—I told you she walked as if her feet were bare; that's got to do with it, somehow. She doesn't want to marry."

But in his mother's scheme of things, girls did not refuse offers of marriage, especially under existing circumstances. Nor was it at that period, the close of the eighteen-nineties, as usual an occurrence as later.

For a moment she was silent, brain and knitting-needles bright and busy. Illumination came, and with it soft amusement at his denseness:

"O my youngest knight, you are younger even than I thought. Did you allow nothing for her pride, her delicacy? How clearly did you betray that it was a matter of duty that prompted your offer? Of course she drew back! What could you expect? She thinks she has cheapened herself in your sight; she thinks—you men, you are born blunderers, the best of you."

In an ecstasy of psychological comprehension she proceeded to reveal the intimate workings of Kathleen's mind, which led to refusal of Gareth's

offer. Revealed them in fashion so plausible and withal so subtle that the analysis partook of the nature of a miracle.

It was only a pity that she happened to be even further adrift in her estimate of Kathleen as a clinging three-volume-novel heroine, than had been Nelly in her vision of Gareth as a gay deceiver.

But Gareth was impressed. He supposed it took a woman to understand a woman. Moreover, viewed in the natural light of things, the Kathleen he was striving to explain to his mother seemed improbable, not to say absurd. He withdrew to his own room to think things over.

After his departure Mrs. Temple let drop her knitting and sat a little while inactive and musing. It had cost something to be loyal to the ideals with which she had striven to inculcate her son, that he should not ever be responsible for suffering. For despite her brave words, she did not want Gareth to bring home a wife. What mother does ?

Gareth lounged at his open window, and smoked a cigarette, and saw the moon washing Paddington in silver, and gave himself up to a course of clear hard logical thinking. His methods of thought left his brain very much in the state of a girl's bedroom when in a hurry she has dressed for the dance. That is to say, he pulled out a vast quantity of reflections from the drawers where they had lain hidden ; tumbled them over the floor, and looked at them in some amaze at their multitude and variety.

His mother's explanations had smoothed for him

the plumage of peace, sadly ruffled by Kathleen's startling mood of the day before. That her refusal to espouse him was due to pride—of the wounded-stag order—over-sensitiveness, shame even, was an attitude he could well understand, and combat with his shield and buckler. His shield and buckler, like Nelly's marguerites and Edward's horsewhip, were of little avail in forcing a way against what the last-named had termed "new-fangled notions."

But below in the stuffy little sitting-room, with its horsehair furniture, its framed and faded daguerreotypes of long-dead relatives, its wool antimacassars, and painted firescreens, and shelves of Dickens' works complete in seventeen volumes, the vision had come alive again; familiar truths respecting maiden's tears and knighthood's redress, slipped back into their old places.

". . . She thinks she has cheapened herself in your eyes"—and chivalry tingled to clasp a lance.

". . . Cheapened herself." Gravely, steadfastly, the lad vowed himself to the removal of that misconception. Marry her? Of course he would marry her . . . and with that a creeping uneasy sensation of helplessness, of unseen pressure.

The objects scattering his brain in disorderly confusion grew blurred and indistinguishable. . . . He was drifting down stream, nearer and nearer to the grey borders of sleep.

"You've got to shove your own way, my lad——!"

Fear jogged his elbow, and awoke him to the window-sill; to Paddington, moonlit and un-

substantial; to the "Happy Warrior" framed above his bed; to the knowledge of his own utter inefficiency ever to pull desire to its successful fulfilment. A liquidity of purpose, as though the moral gelatine had been omitted from his composition. Hence his terror of realities, of "shove," of anything that might chance to drag to light his hidden weakness. Hence his longing for the vanished enchantment of Alpenruh, whither he had been borne as in some strange dream, without his own volition or denial. Hence his illusion that the perpetual presence of Kathleen would again and for ever restore to him the lost lotus-spell. Kathleen should marry him. In a spurt of resolution, he vowed in this one matter, if never again, he would beat down the questionings and hesitations of his soul, beat down opposition, beat down difficulty—even as she herself had taught him. Yes, that was the goad: her possession of just that gift he lacked, the power to *do*. Did he lack it, or only think he did? This accomplishment should be the test. Kathleen *should* marry him! Gareth was exultant in his new strength, as a man who had drunk red wines. His determination survived sleep, survived the sobriety of morning, sent him with martial tread and squared jaw to the house in North Kensington.

Kathleen was out; would be out to lunch. A temporary check. "Tell Miss Morrison I shall call at six o'clock," in tones of such ringing valour that the maid regarded him in astonishment. How could she know he was out on the quest, his eyes on the hill-tops and his head among the stars,

slaying monsters and enchanters as he went ? How was she to recognize herself as a minor monster ? Nevertheless, in unconscious spite of him, she forgot to deliver the message. Gareth, on his arrival at five minutes to six, impatience having outleapt exactitude, was shown into the dining-room, ruddily illuminated by its first fire of the season. Kathleen had improved the occasion by shampooing her hair, and was now squatting on her heels before the hearth, holding up the long wet strands to the blaze. Nelly sewing ; and Muriel reading " Little Women " ; the aged grandfather prone on the floor protesting feebly while Nicolas stamped on his chest : " Mustn't say nuffing, Granpa—you're *dead !*" " But I'm *not* dead ! " " You are, you are, you are ! " " I'm *not* dead," repeated Mr. Jeyne, who really might have been expected to know best—all this made a picture calculated to reduce the crusty bachelor of tradition to tears of loneliness and envy. Gareth's abrupt entrance caused some commotion, and there ensued a great deal of business with chairs and introductions. Nelly was not sure whether she ought to look as if she knew all about everything, or nothing about anything. She telegraphed for her cue to Kathleen, who scornfully withheld it. For her the situation throbbed with that sensitive and unnecessary agony peculiar only to a girl on witnessing the advent of her man into the family circle. She did not know of which to be most ashamed : Nelly in the eyes of Gareth, or Gareth in the eyes of Nelly. Kathleen hated that he should see her thus placed, and off her guard ; hated the circulating under-

currents : " Who the dooce is it ? " in Mr. Jeyne's astonished eyebrows, and : " Take off your pinafore, Nicky," signalled from Muriel ; hated herself for minding that the room was untidy, and two of Nicolas's handkerchiefs upon the carpet ; above all, hated Gareth, as the cause of her discomfort. Why had he come ? And what had happened to him that he should persist in throwing her those glances of glad triumph ? He was talking very fast and easily, and his general bearing exactly resembled the fascinating blackguard of Nelly's expectations. Unconsciously, he exuded a buoyant challenge to the world at large ; the atmosphere about him quivered and vibrated with something that was not of North Kensington nor yet of any other neighbourhood farther from the clouds than Valhalla itself ; for he knew even in his intoxication that if he once paused, the old paralysing distrust would creep on him again and render him powerless—if it were once given a chance in this breathless onrush of speech and movement.

For this was his day of days indeed ; something had happened between his first and second visit here, to convince him that enchantment was on his side. . . . He would tell Kathleen presently—when these people should leave them alone !

Edward's latchkey was heard grating in the lock, and Nelly flew out to warn him of the visitor. " And Neddy, shall I ask him to supper ? "

" Look here," Edward protested in loud and distinct whispers, " we can't sit down with a fellow who——"

" Oh, hush, Neddy ! "

And Gareth's mouth twitched whimsically in the direction of Kathleen. More Indian than ever did she look, sullen, crouching, her face framed in the shining hanks of black hair lying straight over her shoulders and down to her waist. Very unlike his radiant comrade of Alpenruh. Perhaps she had been right when she spoke of the destroying effects of intimate surroundings.

"All right, I'll be reasonable," grumbled Edward, on the threshold.

Edward was a man of his word; and though an occasional hint of "my sister's honour" slipped into his manner, he hovered for the most part between dignified-host and benevolent-cleric.

Gareth thought the Morrison family rather nice, considering; and accepted the invitation to supper: "If you don't mind taking us as we are," said Nelly, and retired to supervise culinary operations. Presently her voice was heard summoning Muriel and Nicolas.

"Yes, but Mummie, why——?"

"Because I say so, darling."

"Yes, but it isn't nearly——"

"Never mind. Come along. Ask Aunty Katty if she will come to the nursery presently to tuck you up."

Now or never, thought Nelly, was Kathleen's chance to display the suspected Maternal Instinct to the best advantage. But Nicolas and Kathleen, joint rebels against Nelly's schemes, gazed sulkily at one another, and parted with a cold good night.

"Excuse me, will you?" said Edward, rising;

"I'm badly in need of a wash. City dirt, you know." He also quitted the dining-room. He had received his instructions. Obviously Nelly cherished hopes that a disgraceful episode might yet be decently wound up.

One swift glance convinced Gareth that old Mr. Jeyne was fast asleep in his corner.

"Kathleen—I've had a most wonderful stroke of good luck. I've found a job. The kind of job that I've dreamt of all my life. The job that lay east of the sun and west of the moon; at the end of the rainbow; over the hills and far away. And only yesterday I was disinherited. Yes, really, my father cast me off . . . said I should never be heir to those huge glass bottles, red and blue and yellow, that fill up his shop-window. . . . I did so want them for my own when I was a kid. Never mind, fortune helps those who don't help themselves . . . and I put my faith in the fairy-tales. How would Whittington have fared without faith in his Cat? Tell me that. Or Jack without faith in his Beanstalk—— ?"

"Or Aladdin without faith in his uncle?" insinuated Kathleen unkindly.

"It was all through you, Kathleen. Just because you weren't at home this morning; and I was restless; and went for a drive on top of an omnibus; and my new job tumbled from the clouds, and I've brought it home in my pocket." He produced a catalogue of Messrs. Dale and Dawson's Autumn publications; educational, historical, and general; fiction, poetry, belles-lettres; Henrietta Street, Covent Garden; and 48 Frederick

Street, Glasgow. This he handed to Kathleen as if it were a talisman of rarest powers. She examined it, bewildered ; but rather loving him in his mood of boyish enthusiasm. . . .

"They've offered me the post of reader," condescending to simple language for pity of her perplexity. Then he was off again, past recall, drunk with ether, spurring his winged-horse ever faster on its empyreal flights.

"Books. Just nothing but books. From dawn till dusk, books. Books all around me, lining my life. Books in the making. Books my trade. The beginning and end of things, books. Great walls of them, shutting out real things, concrete things, ugly things, noisy things ; advertisements and fathers and botanists. Delving continually into a thousand imaginations, treasure-finding ; genius-hunting ; word-juggling. Can you draw pictures from words ? I can. 'Glamour,' for instance. Glamour . . . and something elfin, with misty wings, scattering gold-dust ; and part of it clings to your eyelashes. That's glamour. And 'fantastic' has a leap about it, and the flutter of rags, and pipes—yes, a figure with a pointed cap, playing on a pipe. You've never seen me gloating over my collection of books . . . and every time I add one to the number, counting over all the old ones again . . . handling them—the dears ! And now to be permitted to make a living out of books—yes, actually ; to scoop silver from a moonbeam, spin an income from a cobweb, seek sovereigns in a sea-shell. And there's my own book, too—the one I mean to write ; did I ever tell you about it ?

How I shall be able to write now! My book! Other people's books——!" He stopped for sheer want of breath.

"And—you picked up all this on an omnibus?" eagerly. It was impossible to persist in any sort of gloom in opposition to his charming nonsense.

"Bound for Banbury Cross," Gareth explained, very seriously. "And there came a big spider and sat down beside me . . . no, that doesn't rhyme. And anyway it wasn't a spider, though he looked remarkably like one."

"Who did?"

"Old Mr. Dale; Mark Dale, my Uncle Wilfred's crony. The late uncle from whom I'm supposed to inherit my scholarly tastes. I told him my troubles, for all the world as if he were a golden carp or a blue frog or a singing-tree, or some such traditional confidant. We got to talking about books; he put a lot of questions; I acquitted myself fairly well;—and then he suddenly informed me that one of the regular readers for his firm had given notice that morning, and would I care to take his place? *Would* I care. . . . And that things should happen like that for me! You should have heard my father yesterday." . . . And, Kathleen . . . dear——" Both her hands in his now. No avail to struggle or sulk. Gareth was being masterful. Gareth was being manly. Gareth was carrying a woman by storm. And Gareth was enjoying it, intoxicated by this novel sense of power and success. He had borrowed her weapons of strength, and believed them to be his own.

"Kathleen, it has got to be. All you said the other night may be true enough for other people—it will be different for us. We're not going to lose now what we found in Alpenruh. And no one can give it to me but you; no one can give it to you but me. It was the ether of Paradise, of El Dorado we breathed—and by God! we'll breathe it now for the rest of our lives." He swept the hair from her face, that she might have no excuse for avoiding his triumphant gaze. "Our lives, Kathleen!"

She said: "I can't—no, I won't marry you, Gareth."

But he only laughed; for she had made no attempt to stir from his arms.

PART II

CHAPTER I

"GOOD-BYE, Kathleen; no, I won't forget about the fish." Gareth Temple ran down the steps of Pacific Villa, and swung the gate behind him. He carried under his arm a bundle of manuscript, which he had been examining the evening before. When he reached the office, more manuscript would be awaiting him. For he was still a reader of books. Three years ago he had transferred his services from Messrs. Dale and Dawson to the newer firm of Leslie Campbell. That was all the change of fortune which sixteen years had brought about.

Campbell had himself been a reader at Dale and Dawson, publishers. An excitable and energetic little Scotsman with no prudent instincts whatsoever, he set up business in a third-floor room above the bustling offices of a popular magazine. Assets: Four hundred pounds capital, and the assistance of one impertinent small boy. Invisible asset, a soul that was an infallible touchstone for genius. Gradually he made himself a name for the publication of works by that brilliant intolerant set of young writers who flourished under the banners of Impressionism, Futurism, Iconoclasm, Realism

and Super-Realism, New Thought and Modern Decadence, with equal pleasure and superiority. Presently, and without need to reproach himself with any pandering to popular taste, he was able to boast an inner room to his offices ; and added to his staff Gareth Temple and Guy Burnett, in capacities of reader and confidential clerk. Nevertheless, the firm's treasury continued to be fed for the most part on Campbell's enthusiasm ; till, by way of steadying himself, he took into partnership Vincent Alexander, lately an undergraduate of Balliol ; who, frigid and level-headed, succeeded by sheer weight of his twenty-five imperturbable years, in setting a limit to the indecent exuberances of Campbell's middle-age.

Then Graham Carr wrote " Piccadilly." And the firm began to prosper.

Gareth turned off the Strand, up a by-street, till he came to a shop-window flaunting innumerable replicas of the July number of " The Blue Sky " ; design consisting of a smiling maiden running precariously along a rainbow, and leading a peacock on a red ribbon. He passed through a side-entrance and up a wooden stairway, till confronted by the familiar black lettering : " Leslie Campbell, Publisher," on an opaque glass door. Then he heard the quick pattering trip of Mr. Campbell on the stairs behind him ; and waited, holding the door open.

" Thank ye, Temple. Ah, while I think of it, mek out a report on this, will ye ? " A bulky parcel was thrust into the reader's arms. " And ye

needn't let Mr. Alexander see it . . . just yet. Understand ? "

Gareth understood that the senior partner had happened upon a new genius who might, with luck, sell about ninety-seven copies of an edition.

" Very well, Mr. Campbell."

Together they entered the outer office, as Guy Burnett banged the telephone receiver back on its hook.

" Hale's, sir. Two-fifty more copies of ' Piccadilly ' wanted immediately for the branch libraries."

" Of ' Piccadilly ' ? "

Campbell groaned aloud. " Piccadilly " was the so-called Book of the Year. The volume in its dull red binding had since four months become an obsession in the office. They breathed, talked, dreamt " Piccadilly." It littered the floor, the desks, the tables, the shelves. Every 'phone call concerned " Piccadilly " ; every letter. They took up a paper and read reviews of " Piccadilly." They went for a walk and the cover stared at them from library windows. The entire firm had floated to affluence on " Piccadilly." And one and all, Campbell and his partner ; Guy Burnett, the clerk ; Gareth Temple, the reader ; and Jimmy, the Heart-breaker ; one and all were deadly sick of " Piccadilly." Graham Carr was the only person who was not sick of it. Graham Carr had written it.

" Aweel, send Jimmy over to interview the binder." Campbell disappeared into his inner sanctum. Alexander, by way of reproof to enthusiasm, never arrived on the spot till noon.

The Heart-breaker was despatched on his congenial errand. Then, cheered and refreshed, returned to his task of making into parcels the rejected manuscripts. Merrily he whistled, as he jerked the string into knots ; merrily he whistled as he banged the door behind him, and set off to catch the post. Jimmy, aged thirteen, had been the very first within these walls to break an unknown heart by dispatching a package with slip of paper enclosed : " Mr. Campbell has considered your MS. with much care, but regrets——" Consequently his title and his importance.

Burnett was called into the inner room to be dictated a letter which the senior partner was anxious to dispatch on the sly, before his relentless junior should appear. An exceedingly popular lady novelist, commanding the best existing sale of sentimental fiction, had offered her wares to Leslie Campbell, for the prestige of seeing his name stamped at the foot of her cover. Alexander was considering the advisability of lowering their standards to accept these overtures : " Psychology will never make us a fortune, Campbell ; and we can't live for ever on the proceeds of ' Piccadilly.' " Now, sneakingly, and with immense delight, Campbell dictated his uncompromising refusal of Miss Ethel Erskine's offer. He would have nothing but the Intellectuals. The little Scotsman's admiration of his " Young Men " and their style of authorship was almost fanatical.

Gareth found them tiring. He felt always acutely conscious of being an outsider. Not that it mattered—he was only the reader ; and though

his judgment could be relied on as sound and scholarly, Campbell never made an intimate of him ; never called him " my boy," as he did young Burnett, for instance. As for Alexander, he disapproved altogether of the reader, whom he classified as an idealist lacking in guts.

Temple was older than any of the others ; older than the head of the firm, even. And sitting there at his desk, he seemed to have grown just a little dusty ; to lag a few paces behind the times—while " Campbell's Young Men " rushed fully twenty years ahead of them.

The clock ticked fussily through the stillness. Gareth, proof-correcting, bent wearily over the long strips of evil-smelling print. Quick steps on the stone stairs outside ; and the door burst open to admit a man in a worn Norfolk jacket, and square heavy boots ; giving him, with his tanned skin and boyish blue eyes, somewhat the appearance of a country squire.

" Hullo. Where's everybody ? "

" That you, Mr. Carr ? The chief is busy, I think ; shall I call him ? "

" No, it's all right ; I only strolled in to sit on the table and swing my legs." He glanced humorously at Gareth ; and, having nothing better to do for the moment, dropped into casual conversation : " Has it ever struck you, Temple, what a wonderful thing it is to have the right to break in without apologies on a real live publisher, and swing one's legs from his real live dirty untidy desk ? I used to pace up and down outside here, before you had decided on my fate—God ! what a

time it lasted!—and picture myself doing just that."

"Were we a long time? Yes, I remember now, the Chief was away. But you never enquired?"

"No. And d'you know, if the ordeal of waiting had lasted a decade longer, I should never have screwed myself to the point of asking for a decision."

"Why?"

"One is possessed by a curious spirit of fatalism where the first book is concerned. Things must take their course. What a period that was of ghastly thrills, imagining all the accidents of fire and water which were destroying my precious manuscript. And now——"

"Now you've got there, yes. There's been an order from Hale's for two-fifty more copies of 'Piccadilly.'"

"Good!" Carr made as if to pass on; then paused to say. "Had anything worth while up lately?"

Gareth's face was expressive.

"As bad as that?" laughed Carr. "You are fond of reading, of course?" He flung himself into a battered leather arm-chair, hands thrust deep into his pockets, legs stretched out towards the empty grate. He had never bothered much with the reader before now, and it struck him that this reserved man with the stern mouth and grey-flecked hair, might reward closer study. "You are fond of reading?"

"I—loathe—it."

The words were pushed out with such intense

vehemence, that Carr was startled. "I didn't think it possible for an intelligent man to dislike books."

"Perhaps not. As a young man I loved them so much that the day I got my first job as a reader I walked through London with my head among the stars. But books were then magical mysterious things, that grew on trees, and dropped into my hands. I never gave a thought to the mechanism of producing them: authors, manuscripts, typists, publishers, readers, printers, binders, contracts, proofs—they were hard facts, and had nothing to do with just books. For the first time that evening I read with my brain instead of my heart . . . and I've been reading with my brain ever since, till it's dog-tired. Good Lord, man! *I* can't enjoy a book; I have to be on the look-out for tautology and anachronisms and split infinitives. Books are my bread-and-butter; they nauseate me; it's all I can do not to send up one damning report after another. I read books all day, and carry home a pile with me to read at night. My imaginative chords have been thumped till they hang loose as a broken bell-rope. Books—I can't get outside them, their mechanism and jargon. The world is one vast book, clipped together in chapters. I'm surrounded by men like you, who never drop a pencil without turning it into an incident for their books." From a fierce abstraction, Gareth wheeled suddenly on his hearer. "Now, this very minute, you are thinking I would be an excellent tragic character for your next book: the reader who detests reading. Are you?"

Carr flushed a guilty crimson; he had just succeeded in placing Gareth in the third chapter of "The Gnome."

"Well—er—I think I'll go inside. I've got a new contributor to propose for the White 'un."

"What's that?"

Not to have heard of the "White Review" monthly journal whose issue the firm had been contemplating and discussing for weeks—well, for a week, ever since Ran Wyman, author of "Tom Tiddler's Ground" and spoilt *enfant terrible* at the office, had first mooted the notion? Carr explained, amazed at the other's ignorance.

"No, I've been told nothing about it. Oh, yes, I saw that some special scheme was in the air, but I'm used to that here. It sounds good enough; more destructive than beautiful, though."

"Oh—beautiful!" Carr shrugged his shoulders; no doubt of it, the reader was inclined to be old-fashioned. "All the same, Temple, I don't think you hate books; only other people's books. Why don't you write one yourself?"

"To add to the output of rubbish?"

"Thank you," laughed the author of "Piccadilly," then turned to Alexander, who, very sleek and immaculate, was in the act of hanging up his hat.

"Morning, Alex. Feel like contemplating a new series of explosions for the White 'un?"

"Yours?"

"No. Discovery of mine. Polish woman. I want to show some of her stuff to Campbell; it's soul-shattering."

"Then don't show it to him," languidly protested the junior partner; "already the journal is likely to be poison to the average intelligence. I intend asking Ethel Erskine to contribute an antidote." This, unaware of the letter reposing at the foot of the nearest pillar-box. Beneath his attitude of careful restraint, Vincent Alexander concealed an appreciation of talent as quick and keen as Campbell's own; but he considered the chief ought not to be indulged. With a careless "good morning" to Temple, he drew Carr through the swing-door marked "private."

Gareth sighed. Though he would not have owned it for worlds, had never owned it even to himself, he did sometimes long to be admitted into the charmed circle; the splendid bumptious fellowship of creators. To be acknowledged One of Them; himself to swagger into publishers' offices, pass the reader with a casual nod, sit on the tables and swing his legs and patronize young aspirants to fame. To have Leslie Campbell call him "my boy," and be in the confidence of Vincent Alexander; initiated into whatever literary scheme was afoot—nay, himself boldly to propound these schemes, and have them heard with respect. One of "Campbell's Young Men." One of Them. . . .

He did not often sit dreaming thus. His sixteen years as reader had drained him not only of ambition, but of a great deal of his happy illusions. At whiles, he used to ask himself why he continued this especial work which had turned to drab substance what was once his fabric of enchantment. It was so difficult to break away from things.

Gareth remained a reader. And the past few years had hardened him to mechanical acquiescence.

But his recent outbreak to Graham Carr seemed again to loosen discontent. Without thought of rebellion, merely with the mournful recognition upon him of how far he stood from the inner shrine of fellowship, he sat idly at his desk, hearing the occasional laughter which drifted from the room beyond. Even young Burnett was allowed at these confabulations; a mere boy of nineteen, he was engrossed in the writing of an "Episode in the Life of a Navvy," backed by the hearty encouragement of his two chiefs. Yes, Burnett had started already—and he, Gareth, was now in his fortieth year. Why had he never written his great book? Perhaps Carr had been right in saying that other people's books had swamped him entirely.

Leslie Campbell's office was not a good place for introspection. The telephone bell rang repeatedly. A miscellaneous procession of callers kept the swing-door in an endless gale and motion. The designer of the cover to the shilling edition of "Piccadilly" came to submit his rough idea of the sketch, comprising a hectic young man staring wildly into a candle-flame, above which floated a grinning skull: a bright and attractive notion which mightily pleased Campbell, but was rejected by Carr and Alexander both, since there was nothing in the text of either skulls or candles. Youthful authors of both sexes, timorous or determined, knocked continually at the outer gates, requesting interviews with Mr. Campbell. Jimmy's

job to attend to these, whenever he was present ; but Gareth had been steeled to execute hope with as little compunction as the Heart-breaker himself. The designer emerged from his colloquy within : " You had better ask the pretty-cover artist on the ' Blue Sky ' to do your next job," sarcastically—and in his blind rage collided with Mona Gurney on the top stair. " Come in, my lass ; you're the verra person we need," cried Campbell, catching sight of her ; and she joined the conclave of Olympians. A thin slip of a girl, demure and refined as one of Jane Austen's heroines, she was the only woman writer whose books had attained the honour of being published by Leslie Campbell ; great strapping books, reeking of the soil. " Campbell's Young Men " held her in profound respect ; nay, Alexander almost committed the indiscretion of loving her, because her tailor-mades were of such irreproachable fit ; the two would discuss fashion by the hour, interrupted ever by Campbell's disgusted comments, which but effected that they would mince their tones the more. You could do no wrong if you were One of Them.

The July sun filtered through the dirt-specked windows, on to the litter of books and papers, on to the dusty floor and splashed walls. Gareth had not moved for several minutes, engrossed in the study of a typed manuscript sent up for approval. " Spring-fret," by Moll Aynsleigh. And underneath the title-page, the quotation :

> " Grant the path be clear before you
> When the old spring-fret comes o'er you . . ."

Crude as the veriest green apple, and sentimental as a love-song heard by moonlight, Moll Aynsleigh was in all probability a young girl embarked tremulously on the wonderful adventure of a first novel. Not thus could one enter the favoured ranks of Leslie Campbell. Yet there was that in the hackneyed theme, the quest for Prince Charming, which sprayed on Gareth's parched imagination like water from a fountain. Love and an April dawn—children playing in a garden—the hopeless, laughably hopeless, despair of youth at grown-up frustration of their plans,—a certain tumultuous "I-want-I-know-not-what" which beat through every page like the beating of a little schoolgirl's heart. . . . Gareth, in midsummer, fell victim to a bad attack of spring-fret, vague and troubled and wishful. Knew that he should not be seeing the sunshine's gold splashing through grimy London panes; knew now that he had missed things; knew that he was over forty, and a failure.

He glanced at the end of the book; and set it aside for Jimmy to pack and return. Silly little Moll Aynsleigh ought to have known better than to send her romance to this address. Nevertheless, Gareth was sorry.

"Grant the path be clear before you . . ." how hot and stuffy was the inside of the bus which carried him that evening to Hammersmith. No room on the roof; or else Gareth was not quick enough to shove a passage through the struggling mass on the step. The air was fetid with breath and the smell of clothing and an indefinable odour

of food ; the narrow seats crowded with a selection of the fat of the land, so that elbows were tightly wedged, and bodies sweltered in torturing proximity. "Grant the path be clear before you" . . . he knew that path ; had seen it often : it wound over a hill, a low hill, easy and pleasant to the climber ; hill which humped a sun-slippery shoulder from among the silvery morning mists. And thence, on the further side, the path would dip to a young wood ; the youngest wood in all the world ; younger even than when broidered with the tender green tips and tassels of spring ; younger far than when garbed in the self-satisfied foliage of summer or the crudely flaming tints of autumn. A wood with promises unfulfilled, soul unawakened. A wood of February. And here the hill-path would be laid with a carpet of sodden purple ; the hollows spun by webs of glittering frost. Over all the bare branches of the tree-tops stole a haze of white and a cloud of dim mauve ; but save for these it stood a bridal wood, pale and intangible ; its mesh of lower boughs devoid of all colour ; its spaces silent of all sound but the cold clean trill of single bird, awake too soon. Somewhere, the thin trickle of unseen water ; somewhere, a dark pool with darker shadows. The sun slid faltering down the sentinel tree-trunks of that wood, dared not enter in. A wood haunted, yet passionless. A waiting wood ; not for mischievous pixie or leaf-crowned Dryad ; but for some wan girl, whose garments hung tattered as the tattered shreds of autumn yet lingering on the hedges ; whose ankles were bare and slim ; and whose eyes, blue

hyacinths washed with rain, seemed mutely to wait their tryst with a lover so young as to know naught of evil. Gareth knew where she could be found: at the far end of the empurpled path; seated upon a broken gate. He would come upon her when he was hot and tired from climbing the hill. . . .

He was made aware of the bus-conductor, who wanted his twopence. Of a bony female, stamping furiously upon his feet, because he had not risen to give her room, and of a basket dug into his side by a man in villainous corduroys, basket that evidently contained cheese of a vicious and unforgettable character. Gareth was glad when the Hammersmith vehicle finally jolted him forth at the nearest corner to his street. He knew he was late for dinner; he was usually late; but it was too hot to hurry. The evening had brought with it no relief of wind; merely a greater heaviness to the stale air. The shouts of swarming children free from the Board Schools, sounded intolerably shrill and close to his ear. The sun gave no sign of ever setting. Corners of houses and their roofs, chimneys and telegraph wires sawed and carved the sky into the various bright blue segments of a jig-saw puzzle. A passing water-cart raised longings in the heart and dust in the road, with equal incapacity to deal with either. And here at last was Pacific Villa; hideously uniform with its neighbours on the right and left; square of front garden, devoid of shade, devoid of grass, of everything save a few sticks at various angles of hopelessness; lace curtains at the dining-

room window; blobs of lighter brown on the brown front door where the blistered paint had peeled away. Gareth fumbled for his latchkey; before he could find it, the door was burst open to him.

CHAPTER II

"*CAN'T* you be in time?" demanded Kathleen, not in the harsh tones of the scold, but with tragedy quivering behind her tense demand; "you knew the Collins were invited to dinner."

"I'm sorry," said Gareth gently. How hot it was. How hot—she was.

"And now Lulu has come without Jim—when one only puts up with her for the sake of Jim! And you'll have to see her home."

To Kathleen there were no molehills in a world of mountains.

"It doesn't matter. I hope you started without me?"

"No; we didn't; we're waiting. Come along—come along. Must you go up to wash?"

His hands felt sticky with the heat and the day's work. "Afraid so. I shan't be a minute." He felt her reluctant glance follow him up the stairs, measure the seconds while he plunged his throbbing head into cold water, tug him down again to the dining-room where she and Lulu Collins were already in their places at table.

Mr. and Mrs. Collins had at one time been their neighbours. And though they had moved since then several times—they were of the cheerful but

shoddy type who instantly rent a house on the strength of a fiver unexpectedly turning up, and then quite gaily effect what is known as a "moonlight flit" when their fluctuating fortunes wavered downwards again—yet a spasmodic intimacy was still kept up.

"Jim would have come," explained Lulu in voluble apology, as Gareth took up the carving-knife and attacked the mutton; "but he's most frightfully busy. I oughtn't to tell you—but . . . well, you've heard of this huge scheme they've got on hand for that new sort of wonderful photography?—well, Jim's in that, and of course it means a fortune to us. We're jogging along anyhow just now . . . but in six weeks or so. . . . And then there's that other thing too—you know!—that's just going to come off with a tremendous bang. But you won't breathe a word of it, will you?"

Automatically the Temples made their vows of silence. Lulu's plucky optimism, her continual brag of her husband as the Power Behind in some gigantic experiment, social, financial, or theatrical, was too often unfounded to inspire the congratulatory awe it demanded. Jim Collins was a nice little chap; but Lulu was fourth-rate. Her illusions were fourth-rate. Her clothes were fourth-rate. She prided herself on a knack of turning "bits of things" into a thoroughly up-to-date rig-out: "Kath, did you notice my hat? I s'pose you thought it was new. Not it! My dear, I made it out of that piece of lace on my blue silk, and the remains of that velveteen dressing-gown Mabel

gave me. And I'm sure no one would guess, would they ? " . . . Everyone would guess ; she always looked tawdry, fly-away ; not dirty—but never definitely clean. Kathleen recognized now all the portions of her garments, and remembered the various conjunctions of bad taste in which they had already figured . . . bits of trimming ; bits of bead and feather and lace. . . . Lulu could have stood as a symbolic figure personifying " the Last Day of the Sale." . . .

" Gareth," said Kathleen, watching critically his incompetence with the joint, " when do you get your holidays ? "

" I don't know exactly. At least, I haven't asked. Why ? "

" We must decide at once if we're going away, that's all. Lulu says that every corner is booked already, everywhere."

" Yes, really, Mr. Temple. I would hardly believe it when Kath told me you hadn't fixed anything yet. We're going abroad as soon as Jim's thing is settled ; I daresay it's not so full there. And meanwhile we're going to Ilfracombe, to my brother and his wife, for a fortnight. Jim must have a rest, poor boy."

" I expect we shall go somewhere . . ." said Gareth slowly.

" Somewhere ! Where ? " from Kathleen.

" Well—where would you like to go ? "

She laughed impatiently. " As if that had anything to do with it ? Why do you pretend ? I should *like* a holiday in Japan, or on a coral island."

"Japan . . ." he mused indolently, unable to resist word-magic. "Ivory blossoms on a light-green sky. . . Shall we go to Japan, Kathleen?"

Lulu stared. "Does he mean it?"

"We can afford it so well, can't we?" When Kathleen really craved for something—and her nature allowed nothing less than craving—it seemed to her violation to toss the sacred fancy idly as a toy-balloon. Her pride suffered that Gareth, so sensitive, could yet betray desire for what he made no effort to obtain.

"It would be a lark if you joined us in Ilfracombe. We should be such a large party, wouldn't we? Fred and Trixie, of course. And Fred's pal, Napier Kirby and his wife—the new one—and her son by her old husband—and his mother . . . Kirby's, I mean; she's a Maori!—well, no, not exactly; but whatever it is you call them when their mother or father was. And me and Jim; and Trixie's Aunt Emmeline: and you and Kathleen——"

"It's very good of you to want us," said Gareth, striving weakly to extricate himself from Lulu's gaily growing snowball.

"And perhaps some of your great author chums would come too; tell them we're going to have a glorious time." Lulu's glorious times always took on their hues from the brilliant anticipation and the glamorous retrospect between which they were squeezed to invisibility.

Kathleen remarked that probably they were now too late to book rooms in any Ilfracombe boarding-house.

"Oh, my dear, we're not going into a boarding-house. Not much! Fred has taken a house for three months, if you please. Swank, I told him!"

"That finishes it, then. Gareth and I can't plant ourselves on your brother and sister-in-law. We don't know them."

"Oh, but it's quite all right—you can pay your share; needn't stand on ceremony with Trix. You see, the house is ever so much too large for them; they took it together with the Kirbys; and even then Emmeline Frazer is paying towards it—— Not Jim and me, of course; but then Fred is very grateful to Jim because he let him in as a favour into that big thing of his I told you about last month, and it's going to do frightfully well. I'm sure Trixie would love to have you—she's awfully keen on literary people. Shall I give you the address for you to write to her?"

Kathleen was rather attracted by the notion. She had that restlessness upon her to get something settled, which came from seeing everyone round about her flitting and migrating, astir as swallows with the fever of the South upon them.

"Shall we try it, Gareth?"

"If you like. . . ."

"Or would you rather I looked round at once for something else?"

"We can think it over; there's plenty of time."

"There isn't. There isn't plenty of time. You hear what Lulu says; every place will be crowded."

"Must we go where there's a crowd?"

She might have said: "Are we the right people to make holiday alone?" . . . but pretence had

never yet been completely shattered between them. "If we go *when* there's a crowd, yes. It can't be avoided in August."

He was silent. And helped his guest to prune jelly and custard.

"Shall I write to Ilfracombe? Do say one way or another"; her voice took on that driving note he so dreaded, and which, against his will, always plunged him into a counter-mood of stagnant negation.

"As you please."

"Is there any place you would prefer?"

Goaded less by her irritation than by its tightly drawn restraint, he let fall: "Alpenruh. . . ."

"Where's that?" asked Lulu; "is it abroad? We're going abroad directly Jim's thing is settled—I told you, didn't I? I wonder if we should meet each other."

. . . Kathleen sat furiously biting her lip. How dared he understand so well what she had been all the while thinking? How dared he share this memory, and give utterance where she was silent?

The remainder of the evening was hardly a success. Her brooding indrawn pain seemed to transform the parlour into a tight hot circle of air, in which Gareth felt himself struggling like a fly in a web. Even Lulu was aware of strain, and rose early to take her departure.

"And here's Trixie's address, Kath, just in case you should decide to go after all."

"I have decided. I shall write to-night. Now. Fetch me the ink, Gareth."

Her glance challenged him to raise objections.

But quietly and courteously Gareth did as she bade him. He would have made further amends for his mistake had he known how to do it without hurting her more.

"When did you say you'll be free?"

"I don't know. End of the month, I daresay."

"Can you find out for certain?"

"Perhaps, to-morrow. No, certainly it's no trouble to see you home, Mrs. Collins." Anything to escape the fretting discomfort of Kathleen's voice. . . .

They alighted from the train at Notting Hill Station, and walked the few paces to the shop over which the Collins had rooms.

"Good-night!"

"Oh, but you'll come up and have a drink with Jim. He might be able to put you on to something good; influence counts for an awful lot."

"I don't think I'll come up," indeterminedly. . . . The need of solitude became suddenly overwhelming: "No; if you'll excuse me; I'm tired; long day at the office."

"Good night, then; and I hope you'll arrange something nice for your holidays. . . ."

Gareth sauntered moodily along the dull pavements, and past the blind shop-shutters of Ladbroke Grove. Holidays—and his mind sped back to a phrase in a letter, written some sixteen years ago: "Our holiday—Yes, but I shall always speak the word now according to its derivation: holy day. Holy days—for us, Kathleen."

Well, but what had gone wrong in the years, to have transformed the splendid impulsive creature

of his mountain idyll, to the raw hectic woman of nerves who was now his housemate ? Nerves—she was one nerve ; worn to as thin an edge as the bending blade of an old and useless table-knife. Gareth could not tell how the gradual transformation had occurred. One morning he and Kathleen had had a sharp altercation about—what was it ?—Yes, he had wanted to lie abed five minutes longer, and Kathleen had lost her temper ; then as suddenly recovered it ; and glancing round the untidy bedroom, her strewn brushes vying for place with his razor-strop on the mantelpiece where neither belonged, hearing the drizzle of rain on the window, and the cracked bell from the hall summoning them to a cold breakfast, she cried in a choking voice : " We're not a bit different from other people. I knew it. I warned you," and fled from the room. Then softly Gareth arose, and went to the bathroom, where already the paper was beginning to peel and flap from the damp walls. And there, sitting toothbrush in hand, on the edge of the tin enamelled bath, he strove to recollect the details of Kathleen's outbreak on her horror of certain trivial intimacies of wedlock, that by avoiding them he might yet retain a grip on the slippery substance of their dreams. Bathroom taps ; his mind persistently dwelt on that one allusion : " To hear a man's bathwater running in the morning. . . ." But that couldn't be all. The bathroom taps became to him an obsession, wholly responsible for the present state of disillusion between him and Kathleen. She had said it. And unable to cope

with the actual trouble, he found relief in clinging to the one tangible grievance she might be nourishing . . . he trickled the water very gently into the bath that morning, so that it was barely lukewarm when he stepped in. Gareth disliked lukewarm baths, and he was depressed at breakfast. . . .

Well, after sixteen years, he knew that the bathroom taps had been as much—or as little—responsible as every other link in the dragging chain of habit.

He had learnt to fear Kathleen's intensity of feeling; her exaggeration of every trifle to a matter of life or death; to fear still more the overwhelming responsive leap of her, when he attempted any sudden tenderness. He feared her suffering of remembrance, knowing as he did that a moment lay in store for both when their inability to keep love between them was bound to be drawn from its sheath of pretence. Her one-time dread of seeing step by step that festering intimacy grow upon mystery, had now merged into a still greater dread of hearing the actuality spoken of in so many words. And he was sorry for her disappointment, with a sorrow that was bitterly helpless.

As for himself—Gareth was looking to-night with clear eyes at his cherished dream; and saw that he had dragged it too close, so that it was stained with thumbmarks. If only he could still have kept painless the memory of Alpenruh's glamour; if Kathleen had died directly after—he or Kathleen. She was less at fault than he; she had striven on their return from the land of en-

chantment to draw a charmed circle thrice around it, wherein to keep it detached and wonderful. It was he who had hung on ; he who was responsible for the drab aftermath. Once in conquering vein he had swung past this very church on the hill, down the long slope to the house in North Kensington, to force Kathleen's consent to their marriage. . . .

Gareth was now wandering round and round the wide sweep of road which encircled the church, standing aloof on the topmost crest of the hill. The dark narrow lanes scurrying downwards on all sides to more level streets, were solitary of loiterers. The scent of daisy-studded grass within the railinged spaces of the church lifted from the man his weariness of the long hot London day. Almost he could imagine the cold rush of seven cascades down the steep asphalt lanes ; imagine that in the valley of Lansdowne Road stood a wooden châlet with shutters painted green and pink . . . somewhere a wan girl waiting in a wood—and oh, to be free to seek her out, and all she stood for of youth and impulse ! . . . " Grant the path be clear before you. . . ."

But twenty-four had stumbled into a bondage that forty could not decently quit. If twenty-four had had the strength to have made a clean end to romance when vision had warned him to do so, had not shirked the unknown quantity of pain and longing and empty days awaiting him in the further blankness—what a passage he might then have made through life, endowed with the power

to recognize that adventure need not of necessity be joyous adventure ; and that he was no true adventurer who dared not let go of a once-found happiness ; who thought a dream could be taken by storm, grabbed, and held forever as a right. . . . Pale fool and egoist, blindly groping, blindly resenting—while ahead of him strode in conquering mood the man he had thought himself : brave to exchange love's gain for love's loss ; willing, for the sake of illusion, to plough through its inevitable aftermath of disappointment ; older than needs be, for the contrast of youth forfeited ; hands emptier, because they had been but recently so brimful. Yet unhesitating in trust that all could be met again : love and illusion and youth and fortune. . . . The round adventure, this ; no mere arc of the circle, but completing each time the full sweep of the compass. . . .

Gareth was walking faster now, ideas surging on a wine-coloured flood down the reopened channels of his mind. . . . The man he had thought himself ; Kathleen, tumultuous red-and-brown as he had once known her ; half-forgotten figures of mediæval song, so alive to his boyhood. All trooping past him like some glowing pageant ; set to a cadence of words that sank from triumph to a wistful lilt of regret ; swelling again to the clarion-song of achievement. Dimly remembered dreams floating towards him as clouds drift from all corners of the sky into a rich sunset. Fragments of love-scenes, spoken he knew not when. Slim form of the cool girl flitting now beside the con-

queror . . . now beside the shadowy failure who stumbled in his wake. . . .

But what did it all mean? Was it a book he had somewhere read? He read so many books. Yes, but this idea seemed new to him—"The round adventure; no mere arc of the circle. . . ." The *round* adventure?—a new idea, and good.

It was his own.

Gareth stood stock-still, dizzy with the flash of realization. It was as though a lamp had been lit in the heart of the world. His idea. His book at last. He was glad now that his imagination had lain barren for so long; all that he had should go to the book. His inspiration—his by right of sixteen years' blood-payment.

Gareth strode with pounding heart down Ladbroke Hill. He was in a fever to start, start at once on his book; start that very night, the instant he reached home. Suppose the idea should somehow slide away and leave him with empty hands and blank sight, as the years had done hitherto. Recklessly he hailed a passing taxi, and bade the man drive furiously. Shepherds Bush Road whizzed by, a blurred arcade of colour. A great ship of light swung past with a clanging rhythm. He had thought it a vehicle of misery that afternoon, when it had stood for only just a motor-bus. Gareth let down the windows of his flying chariot, and breathed deeply and happily. Why, every footfall whispered of meaning now. Walls and chimney-pots, the postered railway-bridge beneath which they thundered hollowly,

crowds pouring thickly from a gaudy music-hall, the flare of yellow light beneath the striped awning of a kerbstone barrow, hoarse eternal mutter of blended humanity and traffic—these were no more the mere material for other people's books, realities which endlessly echoed the endless echoes of reality that all day he had to read. His now, the fabric from which pavements and green grass alike were woven ; his, to create into a book, his book, the book he would start upon that very night.

CHAPTER III

GARETH did not start his book that night. Kathleen was still up on his return to Pacific Villa ; and, lamely, he had to explain the taxi. In their financial condition—his yearly salary amounted to two hundred and seventy pounds—taxicabs were extravagances to be contemplated only when matters of extreme importance were at stake. Gareth did not happen to be a liar by nature, to assert that he had felt ill ; nor was he a diplomat, to have resorted to the expedient of stopping the car at the corner of the road. He said simply "I just thought I would like a drive, Kath," and waited for the storm.

She made cold reply : "It's your money, of course. I've written to Ilfracombe. Shall we go to bed now ? It's late."

His money, of course. But their room—their bed—their house. It would have been good, that night of nights, to come home to some place of emptiness where unquestioned he could have written far into the night.

Kathleen, as she fumbled for matches to light the gas, reflected how good it would have been also to have motored that hot night ; driven away from these poky quarters for a space of time, and

hear Gareth say recklessly, "Hang the money! I just thought you'd like a drive, Kath."

"Gareth, the mantle is smashed again."

"Is it?"

"See if you can find another, will you?"

He did not start his book that night.

The inspiration came and went fitfully during the ensuing fortnight. But there was no place where it might take concrete form. Not at the office, certainly. And at home in the evenings, when the dining-room table was cleared away, and Watts' "Love and Life" presided over the stained walls and worn red furniture—how could he recapture his exaltation there, anticipating Kathleen's natural questions directly he brought forth pencil and paper-pad. If he returned an evasive reply, she would not ask again, that he knew. But he would all the while be conscious of her shut-out condition, of her mind torturing itself with reasons and wherefores, of her laborious care in seeming to take no notice. Once, after some condemnatory self-searchings, she had started to take an interest in his office-work, convinced that here lay a remedy for their failure to find oneness. She read quicker than he, was quicker also to condemn, and after her tongue had scorched a romance, his greater tolerance and insight found the task of gathering the ashes too difficult. He had to ask her to desist from reading. This she brooded over long: was it petty jealousy on his part? Had she made a fool of herself in asking to help? No outlet for her energies then, save the domestic hearth. So the legendary cricket was ousted by a veritable

hurricane, resulting from the uncompromising fierceness she threw into her mild offices. She changed her tradesmen continually; and no servant stopped long at Pacific Villa.

Gareth recognized that he must make a start on the book, before his natural sloth wrapped itself in blanket-warm layers around inspiration. He tried, the following Sunday; but the machinery of midday dinner creaked loudly in the kitchen next door. Also, there were many barrel-organs in Hammersmith, and many children, and many church-bells; combination of blisses which rendered consistent thought impossible. The afternoon smelt heavy and headachy. Gareth decided not to start his book till he was in Ilfracombe. They were to go next Friday. Mrs. Worley, Lulu's sister-in-law, had written most cordially in reply to Kathleen's letter, hailing the Temples as: "a welcome addition to our little house-party" hinting at "acres of room" in Rapparee House if Mr. Temple cared to bring along Mr. Graham Carr, the famous author of "Piccadilly"—"Lulu tells me he and Mr. Temple are quite inseparable!" Finally, in a casual postscript: "By the way——" and mention of the inconspicuous weekly payment which would more than cover all expenses—"since you insist——"

"Too much," said Kathleen very decisively. And tore the letter in two. "That ends it."

Gareth assented. "It's more than we can afford, but——"

"If it's more than we can afford, it's too much."

"I suppose so. . . ." London was like a grill

. . . and Ilfracombe, he knew, lay among hills a-slant from the Atlantic. . . . He discovered he wanted to go to Rapparee House very much indeed. And wished Kathleen would not at once, and in manner suggestive of the snap of a handbag, close up all pleasant discussion of improbabilities.

"Shall I write to Mrs. Curtis, and ask if we can have our usual rooms at St. Leonards?"

"I hate St. Leonards; it was drawn with a ruler. There would be rocks and pools and valleys . . . at Ilfracombe."

"I've heard it's frightfully hot."

"You only run it down now, because we can't go."

"You only crack it up for the same reason."

The dispute took place in the parlour of Pacific Villa. Gareth jerked his head away from the window—beyond which he had vistaed green water shot through and through with light . . . cool damp places to sit in . . . jerked his head away—to contemplation of his own photograph upon the mantelpiece—another one pinned to the wall—and yet another . . . they were all over the house. Gareth had an inexplicable fondness for being photographed; threw away money upon it; hailed any opportunity of being snapshotted by amateurs. Inexplicable—but not to Kathleen. Kathleen understood this trait in his character: it gave him a feeling of support to be everywhere confronted by the square indomitable lines of his own physiognomy; it was an objective proof of his being and existence which queerly reassured him in those moods when he could not find him-

self; when grip of his will and expression of his purpose seemed alike slippery and unsubstantial. Gareth, limned on his photographs, was very like the man he thought himself. . . . Kathleen knew! Sometimes, when he was poring over a newly acquired likeness, he would be aware of her gaze upon him, faintly mocking, all too comprehensive . . . despairingly, he wished she had not such a keen perception; wished he could think she attributed his weakness to mere vanity . . . but she knew—and knew that he knew it. They moved and lived among these unspoken knowledges.

This particular morning, however, something in the firm lines of his jaw (as portrayed by Messrs. Hankin of Kilburn) moved him to a spurt of self-emulation.

"We go to Ilfracombe," he said; and his jaw set into firm lines. "It shall be managed—somehow."

He expected a sarcastic comment—but Kathleen yielded for once without arguing. She entertained no illusions that Gareth's present stern resolve to "manage it somehow" concealed any power of coping strongly with future difficulties. But sufficient unto the struggle . . . she was depleted . . . sick of being opposition party. She too wanted the rocks and the pools and the valleys. . . .

She wrote to Mrs. Worley to expect them.

After a steeply downhill drive from the station to the town, and then again steeply uphill to a sturdy red-brick mansion blocking out sight of the sea, they were told that Mrs. Worley and the others

were dining at the far end of the garden. There was resentment in the servant's tone which, it was discovered later, arose from an eccentric preference of the Worleys for carting about their meals in all weathers to any sort of inconvenient spot, provided it be not their own dining-room.

. . . A confused impression of a group squatting on the grass under the wall: Jim Collins, gnome-like, head sunk between his high humped shoulders, grinning them a welcome; echoed shrilly by Lulu, in a sort of draggled fancy-costume representing "Summer." An ugly nimble little man with bronze skin and slanting yellow eyes: beside him, a placid graceful woman, tall and beautifully dressed; prone on the turf, a good-looking schoolboy in flannels, munching in a bored condescending fashion; two oldish ladies disputing over the salad: finally, Trixie Worley, stout and mysterious, tiny features dotted in vast tracts of bursting mauve complexion; and her husband Fred, who was in the eleventh instalment of one of his serial anecdotes, which lasted, with full data, and allowing for interruptions, all day, and sometimes reached the point by evening.

Mrs. Worley came forward at sight of the newcomers, and beckoned them aside:

"*May* I speak to you——?" her accents were sepulchral to an extreme, contrasting comically with her wee round mouth, and nose that was a mere pimple of disproportion. Gareth and Kathleen moved aside with her, wondering what portentous announcement was in store. . . .

"*Mrs.* Temple"—pause—"*have* you brought"—another pause—"your *own* soap?"

In view of the my-God-we-are-observed manner of enquiry, her hearers were conscious of an anti-climax.

"No," said Kathleen. She thought soap might reasonably be included in the price they were paying.

Mrs. Worley breathed hard . . . one could almost listen to the weight being rolled off her mind. "*Good*. . . . I've *put* some . . . in your *room!*"

Kathleen asked if they might be shown to their room to unpack.

They were told, to their immense amazement, that Mrs. Worley had lured them to Rapparee House on false pretences; that not one double bedroom remained vacant; and that she had arranged for Kathleen to occupy a single room in the left wing; and Gareth, an attic.

"My dear," in an enigmatic aside to Kathleen—"it *does* a man *good* . . . for a few weeks . . . I *know* . . ." as they stood for a moment in the doorway of the little white-and-pansy room, down its separate flight of four steep stairs. The space was small but cosy; oak-pannelled; and containing a narrow bed, a grandfather clock, a chintz window-seat, and a quantity of framed texts. The combined dressing-wash-table was behind a pansy chintz curtain, permitting the single occupant of the room to be as reserved as she pleased even with herself for spectator of her toilet. The leaded-window looked down on to a small paved court-

yard surrounded by murmurous trees. It was a room for a very young girl . . . on the little bookshelf which hung on the wall, the former owner had left "Little Women and Good Wives," "The Lamplighter," "Carrots," and—souvenirs of a more adolescent stage—"Jane Eyre," "Poems of Passion," and the inevitable "Omar Khayyam," and "Pleasant Thoughts Birthday Book."

They left Kathleen there; and went on to inspect Gareth's quarters.

"*Mr.* Temple. . . . You're a *poet* . . . poets *revel* in studios . . . my brother was an actor, and —I *know*. . . ." It was Gareth's turn to receive the enigmatic aside.

The attic was also isolated from the rest of the house; and reached only by a twisting rickety ladder from the second floor landing. It was a fantastic sensation to enter one's future sleeping apartment head first, via a hole in the floor. Gareth's imagination leapt . . . looking around him, he forgot Mrs. Worley, confidential from the foot of the ladder.

Beams, everywhere beams, blackened by age, sloping from roof to floor, from wall to cranny, so that to walk around the room partook of the nature of an obstacle race. Windows set carelessly in various angles overhead, patching the dark raftered ceiling with blue sky and drifting cloud. Outjutting corners and burrowing nooks. A stove rooted firmly in the boarded floor. An insecure table that stood solitary by the one window facing seawards. On the whole, more like a rugged bit of coast scenery than a decent sleeping apart-

ment. But Gareth knew that here his book could be written. Here—where he was to be alone. "Grant the path be clear before you. . . ." Fate had cleared it!

He was terrified that Mrs. Worley should of a sudden recollect that after all she had a double bedroom lying about empty.

When she left him, he picked his way carefully over and among and beneath the beams, to the only window which was not a skylight. The sun had set: and beneath him, in the warm purplish dusk, the tiny harbour lay pricked out in an irregular parallelogram of lights. The tide was low; black clumsy boat-shapes sprawled forlornly on the dead sand. Beyond the entrance channel, one sail, a dark triangle pressed against the citron fading from the west, waited patiently for the lifting wave. . . . Gareth stood motionless. . . . Presently little separate sounds uncurled themselves from the indistinguishable murmur, and crept up to him . . . slap of water round the props of the wooden pier . . . two children whispering in a strange rough dialect . . . clank of an uneasy chain . . . rattle of the red window-curtains drawn across, in the snug eating-house opposite. By-and-by these sounds and sights would become familiar . . . already he longed for familiarity . . . longed to move confidently in this dream-world which overhung a harbour under the hill. . . .

"Gareth!"

Enchantment was smashed. It was Kathleen urgently calling him from below. He slid aside the

trap-door . . . hating her. She was standing at the foot of the ladder, a pile of his belongings in her arms.

"As you didn't think of coming for your things, I've brought them to you."

He made no move to relieve her of the load.

"My—things?" in a dazed fashion.

. . . Then he grasped it: they shared a trunk. And Kathleen had been unpacking while he dreamt. How just like Kathleen. . . .

"Well——" impatiently; "do you expect me to trudge up the ladder with them?"

(And she wondered if he guessed how she had revelled in the sorting-out of their more or less joint property into two separate heaps—his and hers, his and hers now—for a little while.)

He came down a few steps, indecisively—then stopped. It was as though he were afraid to leave his stronghold, afraid to touch his possessions lest by their associations they should re-forge that snapped link with everyday.

"This business is an awful nuisance," he remarked; "she ought to have let us know."

"Of course she ought. That woman's a humbug. It would serve her right if we refused to stop——"

"You've unpacked already," hastily. Then, to cover the betrayal: "You're always in such a hurry——"

"I had to get the trunk out of that poky hole: one can't budge in it, as it is."

"Better than being stowed away in a draughty garret. . . ."

"I'd change with you; it's airier——"

"*Is* it?—under the roof!"

Both continued to pretend and to grumble, refusing, in their present fierce grab at the isolation vouchsafed them, to mingle even their thanks.

"You *would* come!"—a thrust at his one masterful fit, when he had overruled her.

"Well, once you had written . . ." and his pause tacitly reminded her of his lukewarmness when Lulu had first propounded the idea.

But their reproachful resentment over the outward inconveniences was genuine. And as for the secret fount of joy—— "Anyhow, it's not due to him!" "It's not due to her!" The exact knowledge of it shrined and guarded in Gareth's mind and Kathleen's, was a wound to the vanity of Kathleen and Gareth.

He bent, and took his pile of clothing, brushes, etc.—dropped one or two . . . Kathleen restored them to him. Their eyes did not meet—from a sort of shame at the grudging spirit manifested in their short parley—— "It's only with *him* that I'm like that," Kathleen informed herself. And Gareth reflected defensively: "It's only with *her*. . . ." He wasn't such a—a beast, really. Not up there in the attic—alone.

He turned and stumbled up. She followed him. He stopped dead, and faced round, blocking the entrance. . . .

"I just wanted to make sure you were comfortable."

"I'm not;" he clung to his grievance. "But you can't do anything."

"I might speak to Mrs. Worley; get her to fix up something different. . . ." She was so positive by now that his satisfaction was too great to let him acquiesce in any such suggestion, that she could risk tormenting him . . . *make* him confess his paradise . . . it was futile of him to try and deceive her, of all people!

He stood at bay. If once she came in . . . it would destroy everything; destroy the peace which had lulled the tired man as though cool fingers were being laid upon the heat and jar of his life hitherto. He realized that she was only prodding him out of harsh amusement; nothing to fear in her threat: she was too glad to be rid of his presence to chance a restoration of it.

"You can't do anything," he repeated.

She shrugged her shoulders . . . and without further speech, re-descended the ladder, and went swiftly back to her room.

Her room!

On an impulse of dread she slammed the door, shot the bolt, and then, breathlessly, back against the panels, looked round at what was to her almost tangible solitude. Queer, how all these years she and Gareth had dragged on in that hateful—that indecent intimacy of every inch of space shared, because neither had dared shatter aloud the forced assumption that these conditions were as both wished them. And now, by the merest accident—Trixie Worley as a bungling ludicrous fairy godmother—they were given their holiday. Their first holiday since Alpenruh. Then, chance had divinely thrown them together; now, chance as

divinely held them apart. Her maidenhood was restored to her. . . . The sensation that at any moment another had the right to walk in, touch her possessions, watch her actions—how had she borne the sixteen years' torment? There burnt within her nature a fierce white-hot virginity, an utter incapacity to share, which all her married life had been powerless to wear away. From the hour when convention and the cramped limits of Pacific Villa had obliged her to watch Gareth struggle with his shirt, love had slipped from her; gave place to an irritation from which there was to be no respite. She had heard him breathing at night——

Oh, the wonder of the holiday nights to come, when she would lie alone. . . .

Luxuriously savouring each unwitnessed movement, she began to undress.

She was feeling rather vividly well. Summer heat had always a stimulating effect upon her; the ghost of her Red Indian grandmother saw to that. A warm colour flushed her haggard face. She crossed to the window, treading lightly as her moccasined ancestors might have done. The air smelt hot and ripe; a faint odour of musk was astir. This was August—she need not begin to think of winter yet. The underlying dread crouched, biding its time. She was forty-three—she need not begin to think of middle-age yet . . . not for a moment yet. She was now very much in the same mood as had sent the girl of twenty-seven with Gareth to Alpenruh. That had been the first panic. This—the last?

Squatting on the window-seat, lank strands of hair clinging to shoulders and waist, eyes straining towards the dark land-whipped pines surrounding the courtyard, she sent forth an imperious summons to youth and romance. Kathleen called it romance. She told herself that because she shrank from contact with Gareth, so all her longings must naturally be spiritual. She told herself that her imagination was starved. . . . Kathleen was forty-three ; and the summer heat fevered her blood and flushed her thin face, as with naked breasts she leant from the window of her virginal bedroom.

In the shadowy attic, candle-lit, Gareth wrote the first chapter of " The Round Adventure."

CHAPTER IV

WITH the tremulous daring of a man who has caught a glimpse of a woman's face once, swiftly, by night, and has feared to see it the morning after, in case it should prove less lovely—yet longed to gaze upon it and gaze upon it, that each subtle curve, each fleck of colour, might at last grow familiar to him as the sunshine, so Gareth set out, the morning after arrival at Rapparee House, to explore minutely that harbour which Heaven had dumped for his delight beneath his attic window. The streets were washed in gold, under a sky of stark cobalt; and the space between sky and street was wind-tumbled and uproarious. A fine jolly day for a landsman to prowl about among quays and ships and mariners . . . and dream that he too had raced through scudding seas and anchored in strange ports. . . .

Gareth Temple, who would have made a poorer seaman than any who had ever doubled the Cape of Storms, found himself slouching along the cobbled streets, and looking ahead with that peculiar scrutiny, keen yet distant, which—the sea novelist assures us—is the inevitable result of perpetual communion with the far horizon; and that peculiar chin, dogged yet steadfast, which—

he omits to tell us—is the inevitable result of the perpetual crunching of ship's biscuit.

Ever and again he muttered words like " cargo " or " chanty " or " lagoon " . . . and imagination never failed to return its quick picture. . . .

Great muscular men stripped to the waist, toiling up a gangway, with loads of silk stuffs and elephant tusks and spices. . . .

The same tanned fellows singing, now lustily, now mournfully, in the lamplit glow of a little waterside inn-parlour, with sanded floor, and smoked ceiling, and a ship-model on the chimney-piece. . . .

Strip of warm firm sand, white-shining in the moon, sloping down to the black polished mirror of deep water. . . .

Spinner of words. Idle spinner of word-magic.

But he was going to write a book about a man who brought word-magic to its rounded completion by fulfilment ! A man who would indeed carry the cargo, roar in the chanty, swim the lagoon. A man who was like himself turned conqueror. And the creation of such a man, in such a book, should be his conquest ; conquest of adverse fate, of acquiescent inertia—conquest of other people's books. . . .

The harbour, like all enchanted spots, though so distinctly seen from a window on the hillside, was difficult to find when plunged into the maze of streets that formed the old part of the town. At last, at the end of a narrow alley, one of the leaning houses flung out a room to meet the house opposite ; he stepped under this square archway

and on to the harbour. From the blistered pink wall above his head, an ancient iron lamp jutted at right angles as though from an arm outthrust.

His first impression was of the dark clumsy hulks of trawlers embedded crookedly in the mud ; while the lighter floating craft, miscellany of broad gaily-painted rowing-boats, and fishing-boats with ragged brown sails, were already beginning to lurch lazily from side to side, as the incoming waves lifted their keels, lifted and dropped the slimy ropes which, hung with green weed, sagged from deck to staple. Then he noticed the soft rise of green and fawn hills beyond the harbour mouth ; and at the end of the quay, the queer little isolated mount crested by a ruined chapel, some forlorn relic of pagan faith, enshrining perhaps a grim old sea-god to whom the sailors prayed . . . once—long ago.

Gareth's eye dropped slantwise to a tin building on the quay, with the word BETHEL large over its porch. And he smiled. . . .

Men used to worship their gods more beautifully than now.

He caught sight of some heaps of pine-logs on his right, in front of the shambling line of fisher-huts that hoisted themselves so painfully half-way out of a sunken ditch ; and went cautiously along the wall dropping sheer down to the slime, till he reached the broad path littered untidily by a huge crane, an old ship's-boiler, a pile of crab-pots, a rain-cask, rusty iron salvage sheds, a patch of nasturtiums flaming defiantly, blue shirts hung out to dry—jumble of domesticity and wreck-

lumber. The pine-logs were oozing stickily, and gave out a pungent resinous smell in the hot sun ; their sawn ends were disks of shiny pale gold against the brown encircling bark.

Gareth sat down. Behind him, the group of huts were blotched in sepia and dim greys and pools of black ; shadowed always by the jutting cliff at their backs. But the gay irregular row of quayside houses and shops on the opposite side of the water were in full sunlight. With walls and roofs of vermilion beside faded orange ; wine-colour, and saffron, and red picked out with green, they presented a curious illusion of some little foreign town . . . striped awnings, and bright-hued syrups on the tables outside the café . . . a man, skin like mahogany, gold earrings that gleamed as he pounced to snatch a kiss from a girl with vivacious eyes, and netted hair gliding down the nape of her neck ; coloured cotton jacket boldly open. . . .

Gareth rubbed his misty eyes . . . murmured " Marseilles." . . . With an effort abandoned word-spinning, and slipped out of his dream back to the dream-like present.

The harbour basin was now half-full, and even the trawlers had joined in the wonderful drunken dance of the incoming tide. Their masts hit and raked tipsily at the sky ; little excited waves slapped at the wall of the square Georgian hotel at the corner ; hotel whose chipped crown on the frontage signified haughtily that a king of England had once stayed there a night.

Cordage and canvas joined volubly with creak

and strain and hum in the opera of that jolly wind-tossed morning. Presently some half-dozen small boys ran naked into the water, and swam among the boats, and leapt and splashed, and called shrilly to their comrades on the quay. . . . Harbour urchins, who lived always under those funny pink roofs, and saw the fisher-fleet sail out and sail home again, and saw the cargo steamers loaded and put out for a longer voyage ; who paddled in the mud and sought there for treasure when the water was low, and dived shouting from the wall when the water was high ; who paid no heed to the yearly influx of strangers ; and never looked at the shrine on the hill—so well they knew it was there. . . .

Harbour urchins.

Gareth watched them, idly. It struck him that one of the band was perceptibly less daring than his companions, and had continually to be urged and mocked out of the shallows.

Odd, for a child to be afraid of water, brought up with the sound of water all day long in his ears, sight of water all day long before his eyes. . . . Something far deeper and more elemental must account for the shrinking, in this instance, than the mere dread of unfamiliarity which so often besets the land-child. . . . Something which, for want of better knowledge, is called instinctive. . . .

The boy stumbled up the dripping steps and ran into the little eating-house with the red stuff curtains, and the plates of fish in the window. Probably the proprietor's son.

Gareth's imagination reeled suddenly, appalled, from conception of that young life, spent in daily

endless warfare with the enemy that lay just outside his very door ; daily endless propitiation, pretence of defiance, tentative play . . . fascination and panic clutching him alternately. Fascination usually existed together with that inborn morbid recoil.

And no escape. No needle-eye of escape. Home fixed irrevocably where the water could stealthily lick the wall beneath his window . . . so that he might hear it sleeping, and waking, and before sleep. The talk all around him would be of the sea. His very food would taste of brine. The tang of ozone would lurk in every breath he drew into his lungs. As a matter of course he would be sent out with other little harbour brats to amuse himself on the rocks and among the pools ; no relief from strain in confiding his obsession to any of his fellows. . . . " Afraid of the *sea ? Afraid* of the sea ? " . . . they would not understand—but they would grin, and pass the joke about : " Afraid of the sea ! "

Later on he would be expected to make his living dependent upon the sea.

No escape then ? dodge desperately as he might, no escape from the enemy. He might defy it with every outward strut and swagger he had at his command.

It would have him in the end.

For this was the lad's adventure : to be afraid of water . . . his round adventure ; his, mysteriously, before birth and through life and after death, full sweep of the circle. Adventure need not of necessity be joyous adventure. . . .

Gareth sat motionless on the pile of logs; absorbed, dreaming, happy, in his trance of inspiration. . . .

For the harbour urchin who was afraid of water had identified himself completely with the hero of "The Round Adventure." But he was aware of the enemy, and would not give in; set out to conquer it—always with the fear in his heart. And with the fear in his heart, he became the boldest swimmer and the keenest to sail of all the lads who lived in the fishermen's huts and over the little quayside shops. And he left his square of window unshaded at night so that from his bed he could see the water—deliberately, because of the fear in his heart. . . . Till by and by he came to hug the fear as his very own, his secret, unshared and unsuspected. There was a queer quality of jubilation in exposing himself to this heavy menacing horror which had singled him out. . . . Only there were moments when the cold sickening ripple up his thighs, as fiercely he waded in, almost drew from him that terrified scream he had vowed no one should hear. . . .

He grew up to be a ship-builder; in time, prosperous. That was one of his ways of defiance. Only each time a ship of his went to the bottom, he knew the enemy had gained on him slightly. And he built more ships—with the fear in his heart; subconscious fear, aftermath of what has not yet happened. . . .

The end of the book had still to shape itself from bewilderment. The girl had not yet moved into her place in the scheme—the girl of the

February wood. Time still for these miracles to happen, when time itself had been transformed to a miracle by the mere fact of writing a book. Gareth rose, and sauntered away from the harbour, up the hill, and back to Rapparee House. It was after midday, and the wind had dropped to a blue shimmer of relentless heat. He remembered there was to be a picnic that afternoon for the purpose of "shaking us all together," as Mrs. Worley had announced at breakfast. Gareth did not feel violently inclined for the shaking process—but he was resigned.

After all, the gods had given him an attic—and a harbour.

. . . . . .

"I *dote* on the *All* Fresco!" explained Mrs. Worley, as heavily laden with picnic paraphernalia, the Rapparee House party plodded solemnly up the baked sea-road, to some wood about two miles distant. Two and two they went—Kathleen and Jim Collins leading; then Lulu and young Teddy; Fred Worley and old Mrs. Kirby; Napier Kirby and Miss Frazer; Gareth and Mrs. Worley. Grace Kirby had placed her beautiful auburn head among the green silk hammock-cushions in the garden, and with her most charming smile had announced her intention of remaining where she was. "We've had so many picnics lately, Trixie dear."

"*Grace,*" ejaculated her hostess with portentous meaning: "I *quite* understand. . . . I suppose you will join us *later?*"

"I don't suppose so," assented Grace sweetly, closing her eyes.

The sorrowful procession filed past her. It was so easy in heat like this, to stop—to flop—exactly where one happened to be standing; so very difficult to move on to another spot two miles distant. But Trixie, blown out tightly with exuberance and mystery, was a tremendous driving-force; and the nine were too limp for resistance.

"*Mr.* Temple——"

Gareth started from reverie and looked worried. Mrs. Worley loomed insistently between him and his frailer dreams; sprawled with grotesque Rabelaisian effect across the blank pages, dimly glamorous, of the sacred book itself—he had an awful fear that she would eventually dig herself in; her ponderous accentuation of the utterly trivial, her fits of hale vulgarity, her unusual appearance—little round eyes starting with surprise, little round hats with gaily plumaged birds a-waggle—the whole personality as it bulged from its unmelting encumbrances of flesh, gripped him with the nightmare obsession that here was material clamouring for immortalization. . . . And he did not at all want to immortalize Trixie. . . .

"*Mr.* Temple, tell me *all* about publishers."

He encouraged her to relate her conceptions of such a firm: four neat rooms, in one of which the publisher and the author and the agent and the artist sat in beautiful fraternity; in another the paper was made; in a third the book was printed and bound; and in the last, sold over a counter to the amiable purchaser.

"While you wait?" Gareth smiled whimsically. "I'm afraid it's not quite so compact. . . ."

He endeavoured to explain the process; but natural denseness and a stitch in her side made of Trixie an inattentive listener. And Gareth was oppressed by the consciousness that he was carrying more than his fair share of the picnic burden; two heavy rugs and the big earthenware teapot. . . .

Miss Emmeline Frazer walked in frigid silence beside her companion. He had shocked her—had just shocked her very considerably by using a word that in decent society. . . . Her whole neat little person vibrated with annoyance. Really—with these half-and-half people . . . one only had to look at his mother! All very well to find natives in the colonies—but in England, where one was not prepared for it—

She decided not to speak to Mr. Kirby any more that day, by way of corrective; it was a pity—they had been enjoying such a pleasant chat about the poet Keats. Miss Frazer trotted on, aggressively cool in sand-coloured linen; she was too thin to foment, like Mrs. Worley, panting enviously several yards in the rear. And her invariable sunshade had excused her from carrier-work.

Of this last, Napier Kirby felt sure he had been given more than his fair share. He carried the kettle, and an enormous sagging box of cakes; also his mother's waterproof. Usually light-heeled as Mercury, he was now depressed. . . .

"It was the year measles were all over the place—not that this story has anything to do with it—

but my brother's children all had it, and then the governess went and caught it too. About March of 1911, I think. Well, as I was saying, I was having tea at Victoria Station—funny how the tea tastes at these buffets, isn't it?" . . . Fred Worley was paving the way to an anecdote, by a leisurely survey of the period, with its principal personages, topical events, and so on.

(But though he was good-natured enough, mind you, it really was coming it a bit thick on a fellow to give him all the crockery and most of the sandwiches to carry—and in this heat! What were the other fellows doing? Not that he minded work—but a picnic was no fun unless everyone did their fair share. . . .

And the bottle of milk, too!)

Old Mrs. Kirby grinned and nodded, picking her wide black skirts out of the dust. . . .

"I've got a fly id by eye!" she announced suddenly. "Please, Bister Worley, take it out."

She was afflicted with adenoids; and with finger-nails that were like black opals.

"Hi! Nap! Your mater's got a fly in her eye!" shouted Worley to the pair behind him.

"Call Teddy to take it out!" was the unfilial advice.

Worley shouted to the pair ahead of him: "Hi! Ted! Your grandmother's got a fly in her eye, and your pater says you're to take it out!"

"He's not my pater," muttered Teddy, furious that his experimental flirtation with Lulu Collins should have been interrupted. But he was afraid of his stepfather; so he deposited the butter in

the dust, for anyone to pick up who liked—it was melting rapidly—and slouched to the rescue of his afflicted relative.

The fly had got well in by this time.

Fred Worley joined Miss Frazer ; Napier having meanwhile attached himself to Lulu. They toiled on, and out of sight. Teddy went for his grandmother's eye with unnecessary vigour. . . . Trixie Worley, passing with Gareth, called out that he was a good boy. They too were presently lost to sight, in the straggling little wood.

" Id's id the *other* eye, Teddy. . . ."

" Look here, how much longer do we drag on ? " Collins demanded furiously of Kathleen.

" Till we get stopped, I suppose. Is Mrs. Worley making for any special spot ? "

" Dunno. But I'm sick of lugging these messy things ; the juice is all running out. I should like to know what the other fellows are carrying ! " He let fall his two bags of raspberries and gooseberries with a squish on to the grass.

" This place will do as well as any," Kathleen said ; and dumped down the enormous jam-jar of which she had previously relieved her perspiring comrade. " There's a farm over there where we can get the hot water."

They sat down to wait till the others should arrive. After about ten minutes, Lulu strayed that way.

" Naughty ! " shaking her forefinger at them ; " we don't mind losing *you*, but we do mind going without the fruit."

"We thought this would be a good place for the picnic."

"Oh, but the others have found a much better place, with a sort of raised hump for a table. Do come along; it's no fun unless we all stick together. Only we can't find Fred and the kettle——"

The sort of raised hump turned out to be an ant-hill. . . . And then a deputation wandered towards the shady bit of camping-ground described by Kathleen and Jim. Meanwhile, Fred Worley came up with enthusiastic descriptions of a paradise for picnickers! he had left the sandwiches to mark it theirs. So they all picked up their loads, and collected each other, and followed him . . . and he couldn't find either the paradise or the sandwiches.

Old Mrs. Kirby complained that she was thirsty.

"*Mrs.* Kirby," advised Trixie, with more than her usual empressement, "*suck* a pebble!"

Mrs. Kirby wept, thinking she had been insulted.

Somebody asked if they were going to boil the water themselves, or get it from the farm. And Lulu cried that it was ever so much more fun doing everything themselves. Unmoved by the prospect of fun, Jim Collins said: "I plump for the farm; less bother. I hate bother."

"But nobody is to unpack the parcels except Auntie Em and me," Trixie shouted hilariously, her hat wildly askew. "*Tea* is to be a great *surprise*."

"It will be," Kathleen assented; "unless someone takes the kettle down to the farm, to find

out if they'll boil it for us. Go on, Gareth——" Her unspoken comment was : " You haven't done much yet. . . ."

Reluctantly he took up the kettle, and strolled slowly towards the farm. He had no desire to be more closely associated with the picnic " fun." He was not enjoying the picnic. . . . had wanted to be left alone that afternoon, to lounge and muse in peace in a corner of the harbour . . . heavy blue-black shadow cast by a jut of stone wall . . . uneven flight of steps, and water lap-lapping coldly at their base, leaving ever another step bare and glistening as the tide receded. . . . Why wasn't he there, instead of inextricably attached to this meandering bleating flock of people, with their red moist faces, and hats of crude disharmony with the woodland. . . . Impossible to detach himself from them. (" It's no fun unless we all stick together ! ") . . . Pestering flies and ants and midges. . . . Mrs. Kirby and Mrs. Worley and Miss Frazer sitting in ungraceful attitudes on the grass, and screaming to the males of the party to witness their sense of the pastoral. . . . Gareth could hear them as he returned from the farm. . . . With acute distaste he noticed how unmercifully the sun-shafts struck crude high lights upon the human nose.

" They won't."

" Won't what ? "

" Boil the water for us." Gareth sat down, with the air of one who has accomplished his best.

" Nonsense. Why ? "

" They said they'd be doing it all day long for

picnickers in these woods, if they did it once ; and no profit to them."

"Well, I suppose you offered to pay them a trifle if they obliged us ? "

Gareth was silent.

"Did you ? "

"No. . . ."

"But couldn't you see that was what they wanted ? "

He winced under the impatient rasp in Kathleen's voice. . . .

"What a waste of time. Here—take the kettle, and offer them a shilling for the favour."

He did not budge. Her attempts to goad him had always the effect of driving him to a defensive attitude of leaden inertia.

"I'll go," said Collins, rising.

Kathleen shrugged her shoulders—and turned her attention to Teddy, who was whispering urgently in her ear :

"Come for a stroll. We're not wanted for a bit. Cut all this rot."

Immensely flattered by his selection of her, Kathleen assented immediately. Every eye observed their departure. Lulu giggled. They walked up the path in silence for a few moments ; his straw hat thrust to the back of his head, his cane swishing at the ferns ; while she debated whether cricket or football were the likeliest topic to interest him. Or perhaps he was a Boy Scout ?

"D'you mind if I smoke ? " and he added gallantly : "It'll keep the flies off you."

She was prepared for a woodbine—but the cigar was a bit of a shock. And then Teddy said :

" It was a toss-up whether I was going to talk sense to you, or just flirt. And then I decided you were too good to waste on a flirtation."

" Don't mistake me when I say ' good,' " Teddy went on. " I don't mean it in the priggish sense. I'm paying you a compliment in not flirting with you. I prefer flirting with married women as a rule ; it's safer than with girls ; married women can look after themselves. But you've got brain as well. And I expect you've got a devil of a temperament. That other creature—what's her name ? Lulu !—one kisses her and forgets all about it. . . ."

" She's just a Type," Teddy continued.

" I'm writing a book on various Types of women. . . . Oh, no, not a novel. ' Observations of Eve ' I call it . . . essays. All women can be tabulated, you know—the frilly, the passionate, the clinging, and so on. Types. I say, am I boring you ? "

With perfect truth Kathleen was able to assure him that he was not. But at risk of forfeiting his esteem she was compelled to add :

" Do you mind—as man to man—telling me how old you are ? "

He smiled, loftily. " How old do you think ? "

She hazarded : " Sixteen ? "

" Most people think that. No, I'm not a bit offended. It's quite an advantage to look a great deal younger than one's age ; a sort of disguise to work under. No—I'm seventeen. . . ."

" . . . Next month," he added.

"I'm interested in various forms and degrees of vice—are you?"

Kathleen felt obliged to make one effort to live up to him.

"From the pathological or the merely spectacular point of view?"

He flung her a look of approval. "Oh, pathological, naturally. I'm past the spectacular stage."

(And oh, he would have made such a dear Boy Scout, with his round cherub face, his blue eyes and smooth fair hair. . . .)

"My father is an interesting example——"

"Your father? Not——"

"Not Nap—Lord, no! He's only a nigger. I tell him so when he swanks too much, and riles me."

Kathleen reflected how Mr. Napier Kirby must love his golden-haired young stepson.

"Then your father isn't dead?"

"Not a bit of it; he comes to tea sometimes, when we're at home." Teddy forgot the various forms and degrees of vice, and became quite chummily confidential: "Mother divorced my father; she jolly well had to. But they're still pals. And I believe she's still quite keen. He's got . . . fascination—I've felt it myself. I don't know why she married this bounder, three years ago. He's tremendously clever in his line, of course, and rich. And she likes to be made comfortable. I don't blame her. But it's a bit rough on me. He was crazy to get her . . . her fair colouring and all that. . . . Rum thing, the subtle attraction of black to white, isn't it?"

"*Nasty* little boy!" whispered Kathleen, unheard.

"But I don't believe he's keen any more; she's snubbed him too often; and Nap's not the sort to forgive a snub. He's not happy unless he's being admired for something. Such an awful kid! And as for his mother—oh *crumbs!* She lives with us too, worse luck. You should just see her when my pater comes to tea!"

Kathleen wished she could. It struck her that the tea-party, complete with watercress, would afford amusing study to the impartial onlooker. She drew Teddy on to discourse on the members of his eccentric family. By easy stages they returned to the picnic party, and found Fred Worley at the sixth instalment of his anecdote, and the rest of the company gorged and quarrelsome. Napier Kirby flung them a quick inscrutable look as they passed him. . . .

And then Teddy demolished the remainder of the cakes, and Kathleen gulped down several cups of lukewarm insects swimming in pale tea; and everybody despondently helped to pack up; and each man took more than his fair share of the general burden; and solemnly, two and two, they plodded away from that place where they had eaten, back to their home, two miles distant. . . .

Napier Kirby had appropriated Kathleen—she never quite knew how; but something impudently efficient in his monopolization rather pleased her. It was evident that she was popular to-day. She wondered for an instant if the man's sense of rivalry had been flicked by the sight of her march-

ing off with Master Ted ; then dismissed the notion of such childishness. . . .

But she was right in her intuition. When it came to mutual exasperation, Napier and his stepson treated one another as equals. They were both as young as the man—as old as the boy. During one of their frequent rows, Grace had been heard to say, in her sweetly detached fashion, that what each of them needed was a thorough spanking.

Infernally bad for Teddy to suppose he could stake an undisputed claim on the most attractive woman of the party ! Kirby had been quite put out by sight of the pair strolling away between the trees. Quickly he had made up his mind that Kathleen should walk home with him. . . .

" Let the others get ahead," in a masterful undertone.

Lulu Collins also lingered regretfully on the scene of recent orgy.

" What . . . *fun* it was ! " she breathed—and sped off to join her husband.

" ' The last sigh of the Moor ' ! " laughed Nap Kirby. " You know that when Boabdil had to abandon Granada to Ferdinand, he paused on the hill for a final glimpse backwards at his Alhambra. And I daresay he said : ' What . . . fun it was ! ' "

" At any rate, it's history what his mother said : ' Aye, weep like a woman for what thou couldst not defend as a man ! '—which was rather unnecessarily rubbing it in, I always thought."

" But typical of a mother. Mine would have said it like a shot ! "

"Poor Boabdil," murmured Kathleen . . . who had said it on numerous occasions to her private and particular Boabdil.

Kirby plunged off into a series of legends on the Moors in Spain. His manner of telling was vivid and enthralling—he spoke as though he loved the forlorn race of Barbary pirates, with its sonorous names and darkly jewelled history. Suddenly he broke off, and said:

"I'd like to take you there. I'd like to stand with you at sunset on that hill—the Last Sigh of the Moor—and look down at the Alhambra——"

Kathleen was smitten with a new racing excitement . . . hot and fierce and sweet. . . .

It passed again. And she became aware of him talking absurdly and maliciously about their fellow-inmates of Rapparee House.

"It was good of you to have rescued me from Miss Frazer—I made a bad break coming up. She told me she was the *direct* descendant of John Keats—who wasn't married, you must know. I asked: 'Got any interesting relics?' 'Oh, yes, indeed; my sister-in-law was photographed sitting on his tomb!' I didn't quite gather whether the tomb, the photograph, or the sister-in-law was the relic; but to carry on conversation, I remarked lightly: 'So you call him your bastard great-grandfather, I suppose?' She pretends I'm not there, now, when she looks at me. . . . She *can't* have known he wasn't married! Or else she wasn't as direct as she thought. . . ."

He gave Kathleen no time for amused comment, but drawled on in his low flexible voice:

" Funny thing, isn't it, that Mrs. Collins really thinks it was fun to-day. She'll go on thinking so. So few people realize the difference between enjoying themselves, and looking like other people look when they are doing something which is popularly supposed to be enjoyable. I had a strained afternoon, waiting for Trixie Worley to burst—she'll burst in purple and red when she does—like that fellow's heart in 'Maud': . . . 'Will rise and tremble under your feet, and blossom in purple and red——' You've played the old game: 'I planted a careful young man and it came up Thrift,' etc. . . . *I* planted Mrs. Worley, and she came up fuchsias!"

. . . Again he darted off at a tangent: "How splendidly you walk. You're not entirely Saxon blood, are you?"

"I'm a direct descendant of a Red Indian princess—who *was* married, by the by."

"Oh, *I* don't mind—I'm not a conventionalist. I'd overlook even Miss Frazer's shameful secret, if she gave me a chance."

Then: "How do you like Teddy?"

Kathleen found his inconsequence rather bewildering.

"How could I venture to criticize that marvellous youth, after he has singled me out for his approval?"

"Oh—his approval! . . . Teddy's susceptible. He may pretend to be smitten now, but he won't stick to you; prepare yourself for that."

She turned to meet the anticipated twinkle in his gaze. To her astonishment it was not there.

Napier Kirby was warning her quite seriously not to rely on his stepson's fidelity. . . . Yet undoubtedly the man had a sense of humour. She grasped that Teddy was on his nerves. And she sympathized. It was a bad thing to have one person continually on your nerves . . . especially if that person lived with you.

They overtook the others, and arrived at Rapparee House as the sun-scorched afternoon was slipping with a murmur of relief over the western horizon.

"I was thinking of a stroll down to the beach," remarked Grace Kirby from her hammock, as ten exhausted people flopped down without speech in the surrounding shade; "the heat has really only just become bearable. . . ."

CHAPTER V

FOR two days Teddy made Kathleen conspicuous by his gallant attentions; so that on the evening of the third day she was somewhat taken aback when, instead of inviting her to sally forth for their usual stroll round the Capstone, he merely lingered in the hall after dinner to gladden her by a little airy chat, and then rather abruptly disappeared. A rumour passed about, later on, that he had been seen acting escort to a young girl, a very young girl—only his senior by four years or so.

Kathleen understood that she had been wrung dry of all material necessary for yet another addition to his "Observations of Eve"; and that now he was allowing himself a little pleasant relaxation from conscientious psychology. . . . He was young enough, and she old enough, that without embarrassment she could sham extreme indignation and a broken heart to those who chaffed her on his desertion. But she was sensible of a slight feeling of mortification, nevertheless; it was not in the nature of Kathleen to take even a schoolboy's defalcation lightly. She determined, however, to let no trace of this appear in her manner towards the culprit, when he should choose to approach her with a contrite desire to renew their charming

intimacy. She was reading in the sitting-room the following morning, when Teddy marched in—and, on seeing her, looked very much inclined to back out again, speedily.

"Good morning, Teddy," said Kathleen.

"Oh . . . 'morning!" with a marvellous recovery of sang-froid; "how are you? I was looking for my tennis-racket. . . ."

"Rather warm for tennis this morning, isn't it? I thought we might walk over to Hele Bay and bathe there, if you've nothing better to do?"

"Er—I'm afraid I'm engaged," Teddy replied distantly. And, slightly raising his cap to her, strolled from the room.

Kathleen turned to meet the mischievous twinkle in the eye of Teddy's stepfather, leaning against the open garden door. She strove to laugh away her furious discomfiture.

"It looks as though I'd been jilted!"—(*Nasty* little boy . . . to let it happen in front of Napier Kirby!)

"Teddy always does that. Don't let it worry you. I'll walk with you to Hele Bay."

"Thanks!" between the condescension of the man and of the boy there was not much to choose. "Thanks; I'd rather go alone."

Giving Hele a wide berth, she went past the Haunted Farm, through the wood of the picnic, and across a stile into the lush pastured valley beyond. And she thought fiercely and incessantly of Napier Kirby. . . .

Fred Worley, who admired his friend to the verge of boring to extinction anyone who cared to

listen on the subject, had supplied her with quite an amount of interesting information. She had learnt that Kirby was born in New Zealand, but that he had at a very early age emigrated to Europe. After a great deal of adventuring, he had finally settled down to make money in the manufacture of a new line of cheap but effective motor-cars: the "Dagmar," of which he had by swift appreciative instinct acquired the patent.

Four years ago he had fallen headlong in love with Grace Frensham, and by his foolhardy uncalculating behaviour had nearly wrecked her chances of establishing a divorce case against the libertine who was Teddy's father. . . . ("And who sometimes comes to tea," Kathleen murmured under her breath.)

Worley seemed to regard the Kirbys' presence at Rapparee House as an enormous favour bestowed on himself and Trixie; a favour for which he was quite unable to account, unless it were that Nap was touched by his devotion.

"He's grateful for your admiration," remarked Kathleen; she had already noticed that the little man could absorb any quantity of this; and possibly was not at all averse to spending a couple of months in the continual company of his combined Boswell and Sancho Panza. . . .

Yet Kirby was by no means a personage to be laughed at, despite his enormous vanity, his childishness, his affection for gaudy achievement. He had power; and he had brain; and swift subtle penetrations; probably unexpected tracts of chivalry, forbearance, in his strange composition.

And he had come out on top in the great wrestle for place; a strong item in his favour, this—from the point of view of Kathleen, who scorned failure.

She became aware that the object of her meditations was taking a walk some sixty yards in her rear . . . with evidently no manifest desire to catch up with her. She had no notion how long this state of affairs had existed . . . but swung on, the blood raging at her lips . . . because at swift sight of him had come the thought: "*How* he could make love, this—dark man!"

Presently, unable to bear any longer the mental obsession of him at her back, she halted; turned to face the reality. He smiled as he drew level—gleam of dazzling white in a mobile well-cut mouth.

"I told you I was going to Hele. How did you know I had come this way?"

"The patteran taught me," replied Napier nonchalantly.

"The patteran?"

Following his glance, she saw that she held some fragments of leaf in her hand. It was her wanton habit, while she walked and brooded, to pull leaves from hedge or bush and tear them abstractedly to bits along their network of veins. It was an easy matter to follow the trail of destruction.

"I said I wanted to go alone."

"Sure. And you can go alone. I'm quite happy as we were before you stopped. It's a treat to watch the way you walk."

Disdaining to walk any further as an exhibition

for his applause, she lay down to rest in a field ablaze with some pungent yellow weed.

Instantly he had flung himself down at her side, and kissed her—and kissed her—as she flamed to sudden haggard beauty. Kissed her. . . . Grace, once fascinated by his very difference to the Anglo-Saxon, had for several months gently trickled cold water upon his outbursts of love; his pride smouldered . . . till now it avenged itself upon the woman with brilliant eyes, and black heavy hair, and supple body pressing down the gay hot-scented weeds—— This woman could never taunt him with the dark thick blood that flowed in his veins, because of the streak in her own that matched it. . . .

"You—squaw . . . didn't you feel that this had to happen, the second ever you set eyes on me . . . ?"

Over-ripe, she needed only the touch.

. . . Sun steaming at high noon upon its yellow valley—his voice like molten gold—his kisses fire on her throat—— Was there at last sufficient heat in the whole chilled world? She absorbed it; sucked it into her craving system; gave it out again in great torrid gushes. Napier was startled into fervour keener than he had meant to display in what was three parts a mere vicious back-fling at Gracie's charming lazy indifference. Somewhere deep down in the recesses of his nature, he registered a prudent hope that Temple knew how to look after his wife, and would not allow the thing to go too far. . . .

Teddy brought Miss Cissy Norris in to lunch at Rapparee House, by Trixie's special permission. As Napier and Kathleen strolled out to the table laid by way of a change in the centre of the vegetable garden, the former heard old Mrs. Kirby state with remarkable affability :

" Biss Dorris—you are positively the *odly* persod who cad brig a sbile to our Teddy's lips ! " . . .

She would not have been forty-three had she not attached a quivering importance to the trappings of her romance ; the delicious sense of secrecy and guilt ; Napier's perfect play of indifference in the presence of others ; amused appreciation of their susceptibility to his skilful management, so that again and again they snatched an apparently accidental meeting undisturbed. Most of all, she enjoyed making the elaborate excuses necessary to retire early to her room. Then came the lonely hour or two of anticipation—wild restlessness exulting in the foreknowledge that it would be soothed—that it could be soothed . . . presently.

Oh, destiny and Trix Worley, you were astoundingly gracious to give me this little room in which I can be alone to think of my lover. . . .

Her ears at strain to catch sounds of the party retiring to bed. . . . The last door closed. . . . Then vigil at the window which dropped barely six feet down to the paved courtyard. . . . Till his figure showed a dim blur in the sultry moonless night—— Till she could throw on a cloak, and join him.

" Like the first bite off a great warmly flushed

apricot," he murmured, kissing her throat. . . . Yes, she had been right in her surmise that the dark man could make love most wonderfully. . . .

It was good, too, when, tumbled and dew-soaked, she slipped back to her white-and-pansy shelter, to repeat over and over again each new love-line he had given her—add it on to the old—the building of a song.

And that she took such intense pleasure in these trivial outward symbols of her rejuvenation, was it not convincing proof that youth must still be hers ? Was it not the essence of youth—of extreme youth even ? . . . Or else, Kathleen, was it age pursuing youth around a circular course, to a point where they almost touched ?

But she was glad that her heart could still beat, and her cheeks flush, and her lips lie, for folly's sake. Too glad. The fever and glory of her nights must surely have been absorbed into the very walls of the room, so that the sixteen-year-old schoolgirl, returning later on, would marvel at the queer hot thoughts that vaguely disturbed her peace, as a-sprawl upon the chintz counterpane, she read her favourite " Little Woman." . . .

Whereas Kathleen came to know Napier better with the flight of days, he never expressed any curiosities with regard to her. Either he made love to her, brilliantly—or else talked, brilliantly, about himself, his past achievements, his schemes for the future, the reputation he had among his fellow-men for an uncanny flair in the choice and management of the wily automobile. " They all say : ' Go

to Kirby! Kirby knows! He understands the *nature* of cars!'—— Well, it comes to just that; there's not an engine, good or bad, that I can't coax into putting out its best. Heard of Thesiger?"—mentioning a famous millionaire banker—"He said to a pal of mine: 'I'd no more think of buying a new make of car without first taking Kirby's advice——'"

The man boasted; but one believed in him. He radiated an atmosphere of success—and she had had enough of the temperament that hangs back from venture, irresolute, deprecating.

He presented the same blank surface of unconcern to the mention of any book or work of art which his own enthusiasm had not primarily chanced upon: "I like to discover the world for myself, and not have a showman at my elbow saying: 'Look!' all day long," said Nap Kirby—who himself was saying: "Look!" all day long . . . or, by way of variation: "Look at me!"

But Kathleen rejoiced in his aloofness from her concerns. Oh, the rest, the utter rest mingled with the sensation of a new skin grown over the fretted others, which lay in the thought that her hidden sores and bitternesses, so apparent to Gareth, were entirely unsuspected by the sunny egoist who professed to love her. That where Gareth's own shrinking delicacy guessed instinctively how she could be hurt, and spared her whenever possible, insulting her doubly by his forbearance, Napier remained sublimely unaware of such matters as the approach of winter, and bathroom taps, and the strain of glamouring where glamour was no

more, and the terror of forty-three next birthday, and a temper that had been chafed by daily intimacy with incompetence till it was harsh as the taste of blood in the mouth. She could go to Napier without the buzz of these torments about her brain and ears. She could go to him lightly . . . hear him say, with that careless caress in his voice that was so wonderful to her—" You're like me, Kathleen, you think that——" or " You feel that——" confidently wrong in every one of his assumptions; never bothering to verify them. She wore the ready-made temperament . . . and fervently, in her secret heart, did she thank him for it. More than for the starved passion he had satisfied, more than for the buoyant atmosphere of power he exhaled, Kathleen loved him because he did not understand her. . . .

Meanwhile, Gareth wrote his book.

Its existence diffused a miraculous sheeny quality over everyday life. He had only to feel for the remembrance of it, a talisman between his palms—and things and people ceased to annoy, were merely a moving pantomime for his amusement. His sense of the whimsical, grown rusty with the years, was now suddenly restored to him. Even Kathleen no longer possessed the faculty of rasping him with her exasperated knowledge of his exact failings and what they had led to—or not led to—in the past. He did not notice that she bothered him at all any more . . . so preoccupied was he with figures less real—infinitely more real. Just occasionally the talisman failed him; those were the hours following a mood when he had

lacked the necessary spasm of energy to take up his pen and commence work, usually fluent enough after the start had been made. Those hours he would go sick with the fear that the old enemy within him—that which Kathleen had once named Atrophy of the Initiative, would eventually prevent even this cherished endeavour from fulfilment . . . and those were the hours when again he was aware of Kathleen's voice.

Interludes, also, of the purely grotesque, when Trix Worley tumbled flat across his borderlands like an enormous figure in harlequinade, and lay a-sprawl and immovable . . . his mentality was quite helpless against these irrelevant incursions.

But for the most part the merry haphazard days were dream-misted with secret consciousness of his table by the attic window. He enjoyed, as early as possible in the evening, bidding the noisy party 'Good night'; and leaving them to their games, their flirtations, their cards, their walks; stole up the creaking wooden stairway—surely the path to some hidden treasure of doubloons and moidores, pouring in dusty, twinkling showers all about a mouldering skeleton-form. The door closed behind him; the two candles lit, erect spear-heads of gold, envied by the far-off stars which thickly sprinkled the skylight patches. Then Gareth would sit down to the table; handle caressingly his pile of papers; fall into a reverie . . . whence he was roused by the cool brush of fingers against his throat, across his eyelids.

She never failed to come, the cool girl of his dreams. He knew now that she must always have

belonged to him ; had even hovered mistily in the background of his thoughts, when his mother had called on her " youngest knight " one day to keep troth valiantly with love. It was the deep-hidden longing for her tenderness and shade which had made the years of glare and strain so wearying, so unbearable. And then, with the vision of the February wood, she had shown herself to him ; in the attic with its murky fading corners, she had become real. He had gradually learnt a great deal about her : she did not sleep in the wood, as he had always supposed ; but on the top of the hill, where stood a tumble-down bare-walled hut with a crooked door, and around it a patch of ground barren save for one fir-tree standing close against the window, catching the sunset flame in autumn, tip-tapping endlessly throughout the snowtime. A Grimm's-fairy-tale cottage ; he believed there must be a grandmother in the kitchen that was eternally darkened by shadow of the fir-tree ; but he had not yet raised the latch to see.

The girl whose touch was cool—Gareth did not doubt that somewhere she existed for him ; but he had blundered, and so never found her. The hero of his book would not blunder thus. There lurked a queer and almost vicious pleasure in the endowment of this man with the essential quality himself had lacked, that he might win through to the essential end himself had missed. Gareth adored his conqueror, whose story he had fitted together bit by bit, pieces of a jig-saw puzzle, till now it stood complete, all but the final inspiration.

He lingered lovingly over the opening chapters, which described in tender detail Kay Rollinson's childhood as a harbour-urchin. Came an episode, at the age of fourteen or thereabouts, when the ever-dormant fear in his heart awoke to a vivid frenzy of terror . . . he was driven by it inland—inland—away from all possible sight of that pallid grey-green ripple of ocean . . . till at last, heedless in which direction he went, he reached the February wood; a wood haunted yet passionless . . . where the vision came to him of a girl, slim and ragged and bare-ankled . . . her thoughts were cool silent places where no water sounded; her voice touched the fear in his heart, and laid it to rest. Drowsing with his cheek pressed down to the carpet of sodden purple leaves, the boy knew that one day, inevitably, he would find such a girl, in such a wood. . . . And he vowed to wait for her, and be steadfast to his vision, till the full sweep of adventure brought it round.

Four years. And then—as had been the case with Gareth—Kay's adolescence was kindled by encounter with a girl flushed and vital and eager . . . *not* the girl of the February wood. They swept each other on to experiment . . . a wild forbidden journey together in a tramp-steamer that had called at the harbour to take in coal . . . a week, stealthy and rapturous, spent on an island off the coast of Ireland. . . .

Then, at the height of rapture, inexplicable flight of the girl.

At first Kay was possessed by the one idea of seeking her out again, to renew the glory of which

he had so staggeringly been deprived. But at the moment when his quest was successful, when, unseen himself, he saw her again, came realization that she was not the love he had waited for; and that the quest itself—ceaseless grapple with the void and desolate hours lacking her; memories that were as wounds that could not bear the lightest touch—all this tumult and turmoil of pain hitherto unknown—all was but that other curve of adventure which he must perforce accept without shirking, as he had accepted the wonder of her red hair, and her black eyes, and her passionate imperious ways.

Perhaps she never knew that he had seen her. He turned his back on the possibility of romance prolonged . . . in silence returned to the harbour; to the workshop where he had been learning the business of shipbuilding, before sex had called him out and away. . . . And now, when time had outworn the pain and the unsatisfied craving, the path was clear for that other girl—his girl—predestined his, now he had beaten down the temptation to forsake a mere promise . . . a dream. . . .

"Grant the path be clear before you——"

. . . And suddenly Gareth broke down; sat with face buried in his arms, shaking in every limb; the blood sweeping to his head and as quickly ebbing again . . . strange clanging discords in his soul. . . . He hated Kay Rollinson for being able to do this, this which he had failed to do . . . years ago, at Alpenruh. Was sick with momentary

envy of the man he had summoned into being—his brain-creature—his slave.

There had been subtle fascination in thus deliberately setting him in the same circumstances as his own; in forcing him to the same crisis . . . and wrenching him out triumphant.

But it wasn't fair—not fair—God had made Gareth Temple futile and rotten of will. Kay Rollinson's god had been kinder.

Well . . . he had started to write; had pledged his self-respect to this one achievement at least. So he would have to go on mocking the man he was, with a splendid paper-and-ink conception of the man he thought himself. No . . . he was not ungrateful; he loved his book, and the hero of it. . . . It was only just for a little while he hated him for not having blundered as he himself had blundered. . . . For Gareth the path was blocked now, if she should come . . . if she should still come. . . .

August throbbed and flared to a tropical consummation.

Gareth's holiday would finish to-morrow. And Kathleen's. How much of what each had separately found would be capable of transplantation to Pacific Villa, Hammersmith?

"*Mr.* Temple. Did you know that we live *quite* close to you, in London?"

Gareth had not known. It was something of a shock to realize that henceforth and at any moment a stout spectre might glide up behind him, touch him on the shoulder, beckon mysteriously—"A

word with you. In *private.*" And then: "*Mr.* Temple. Is the day *wet* or fine?" . . .

Gareth was not quite sure if the tidings of her future proximity were blessed.

And Kathleen?

"Nap—I shall see you in London?" tensely.

"Well, what do you think? Perhaps not," he drawled, teasing her.

"When? Where? It won't be easy. It won't be the same as here."

"I'll fix something; don't you worry. We'll all be back in a fortnight. And I like loving old people in new places."

Laughing, she thanked him for the compliment. She was never harsh or bitter with Kirby.

"And in different climates?"

"There is no climate in this infernal country. It's all just weather. One day, you Indian woman, we'll run away together, South, and remember what it is to get comfortably tropical."

He spoke carelessly . . . but out of the words "we" and "our" she wove herself a garment of warmth. . . . It was all right—romance was not at an end for her; romance was hers, here, and in London, and beyond London—he had said: "One day. . . ."

Directly after sunset, on the last evening of his holiday, Gareth went down to the harbour.

Full tide. The waves had ceased to dash in; and jet-carved against the dull gold sky, cargo-steamer and sailing-boat floated high upon the

brimming water, that was tranquil as a mother with babe at her breast. Ever and anon, a larger undulation from beyond the harbour mouth swang and stirred luminous green depths, and shivered the dreaming reflections of white wall and mauve roof and pink roof, till they spread in dark stains of wet over the edge of the quay. . . . A great lazy sea-monster, slobbering its triumph over a victim foredoomed. . . . Yes, the tide exhaled an evil impression to-night . . . more than mere peace in this boundless endless ripple . . . slumberous, replete. . . .

Thus water would look when at last it could claim Kay Rollinson.

. . . For years he would have forgotten his round adventure. He had met the girl of his vision, the girl of the February wood ; he was free when he met her ; she had laid cool fingers on the fear in his heart, till it was at rest ; till he ceased to defy it and grapple with it—but went to live with her inland, far inland, where there was no sea to remind him.

He had retired from ship-building. An age of steel and steam had arisen, which left him and his methods sadly in the rear. The sea was still being conquered—but not by him. He found other, lesser interests ; farmed his own lands for his own pleasure ; travelled ; read books, and collected art treasures. He had many friends. And there was also his little daughter.

For years he had forgotten.

Came a day when he discovered that his young wife was loved by a youth younger than himself,

weaker, with tender charming ways . . . elfish ways.

Rollinson asked her if she would wed this newcomer, if he were dead and out of the way. She looked straight at him with her eyes that were blue hyacinths drenched in rain . . . and replied :

" Yes."

" Would you go to him as things are—away from me ? "

" No. Because of Iris."

That morning had come a letter informing him of a grave money loss. For his fortune had still remained in the ship-building business, when he retired from it.

The boy was rich—that boy to whom she would gladly have gone, if her husband were dead.

Clearly, Kay Rollinson reflected, his life stood in the way of her round adventure.

" That can be arranged." He loaded his revolver in all its chambers ; wrote a letter to his closest friend—who happened to be that same youth with the charming elfish ways—explaining that unable to face financial ruin, he intended to shoot himself that night. And with his revolver in his pocket, he went out.

. . . They found him the next day, drowned in the canal of a town some miles distant. The revolver was in his hand—loaded in all its chambers.

The canal flowed wearily into a river, and the river to the sea. And no one could tell how water

had eventually claimed the man who carried in his soul the fear of water. . . .

So Gareth came by the end of his book : " The Round Adventure."

CHAPTER VI

HOLIDAYS were brief at the firm of Leslie Campbell; September meant strenuous preparation for the rush of autumn publications. "Piccadilly" had just gone into its shilling edition; and Ran Wyman had written a novel which was hastily, and quite rightly, banned by the libraries; this involved a tremendous amount of heated correspondence with the papers; the first number of the "White Review" would be issued the following month. And though the fortunate of the earth were still dallying by sea or mountain, the staff of Leslie Campbell could afford to do without ordinary people's relaxations —so argued Guy Burnett in his enthusiasm, and sadly the Heart-breaker assented.

But the turmoil and clatter at the office, the brilliant never-ending jargon of intellect, the exaggerated importance these Pioneers of the Future attached to their own and one another's brain-products, all this no longer affected Gareth in the same melancholy sense of being forever a mere looker-on. His book, till the present loved for itself and the treasures he put into it, now that he was back in London, twinkled into being as the key which was by and by to admit him to the fellowship of "Campbell's Young Men."

One of Them!—did ever a youthful squire yearning to sit at Arthur's Round Table of Knights, regard his hard-won spurs with half the reverent incredulity, as Gareth the book which was to procure him a place at the literary round table. There lurked no pain now in watching their impatience of outsiders, their splendid overwhelming swank. They did not lord it on false pretences; not one but had by some intellectual achievement earned a seat at the board; by some achievement. . . . Gareth fumbled for the consciousness of his half-finished book. He felt swelling up within him vast possibilities of swank, delicious new sensation which had hitherto been entirely foreign to his nature. How patronizingly he would encourage Guy Burnett: "Finished your 'Episode of a Navvy' yet, my lad? O you young pessimists. . . ." With what a careless air would he accept Campbell's invitations to dine, and (seated at his host's right hand) how eloquently hold forth on his lately discovered philosophy of Attainment in Denial. Then the ease with which he would slip into his niche at gatherings in Mona Gurney's delightful Sussex cottage, Ran Wyman's eccentric suite of apartments in the Adelphi; Gareth had heard these spoken of; knew too that Graham Carr had a cherished abode in Devon, where the elect could at any time walk in with their portmanteaux: "I've run down to hammer out my new theme with you, Carr." "You're welcome, Temple, old man"—and the long intimate talks lasting far into the night. The insolence of the Heart-breaker would naturally have dissolved by

then into the profoundest respect. And a suppressed dislike for the junior partner could at last find vent in speech: "I don't agree with you at all on that point, Alexander," swinging his legs from the desk in the inner room.

Mere childishness, perhaps, all this. Toys of fancy not fit for a grown man, for a man of forty years. The main miracle of the future was to be possessor of the creative gift; to walk on the shoulders of the rest of the world, pealing your message from the silver trumpet at your lips. Ah! but Gareth wanted the little human things as well—he had done without for so long; so long been overlooked and shoved aside; despised or pitied; a cipher, a negative quantity wherever he chanced to be; a failure—he desired the trivial tangible circumstances of success, or he could never believe it had really and actually come to him, to him, Gareth Temple, reader of other people's books. Whenever, late evenings and Sundays, he slackened at his labour of writing, and glancing round the ugly little dining-room, would think despondently of the sea and the attic window, then he had only to murmur the magic catch-phrase "One of Them" to be spurred to fresh bouts of toil. Of the success of the book finished, he had not the slightest doubt; this was not conceit, but rather judgment made fine and discriminating through long years of practice; not blind conceit, but a marvelling humility at the strange good fortune which had at length befallen him, permitting him to stumble on an idea above all things new, new and arresting. His style had

always been faultless; slightly over-ornate, perhaps; something quaint and scholarly in the formal phrases that grouped themselves around an incident, like the rich blue and red and gold decorations on medieval parchment margins. But that would contrast well with the vigorous stripped sentences of the realistic school. No doubts then, as to ultimate triumph. Where Gareth did experience a few uncertain twinges was as to his moral capacities for the leg-swinging act, even when the right to swing was his own. Suppose—suppose after all he decided not to place his work with Leslie Campbell for publication, but send it rather to the Booke-Shoppe, an old-fashioned firm existing since the declining years of the nineteenth century; which continued to publish for the most part essays and belles-lettres, slender volumes of poetry and costly illustrated folios; a firm of book epicures, somewhat *précieux* in their handlings as delicately contemptuous of Campbell's strong red meat, as were "Campbell's Young Men" superior on the score of caviare and *hors d'œuvres* contributed by the Booke-Shoppe to the general feast of literature.

Gareth went once to have a look at the Booke-Shoppe, stealing a twilight half-hour from the day's drudgery with Leslie Campbell. Thus the quest held a guilty pang of disloyalty not altogether unpleasant. He also knew that he would again be late for dinner; likewise that the gazing upon the outer walls of a publisher's sanctum was the sheerest folly, with the book lying scarcely more than half completed in his desk at home.

Guilt and folly and a secret quest were good companions for a mellow September evening; the sunset powdering all the roofs of London with gold; Bloomsbury Church lifting a dazzling spire into the tender fading blue of the sky-strip that tented Holborn; and a blind man's fiddle scattering its melody, now plaintive, now a mere scraping jig, among the rapid swell of footsteps on the pavement. The Booke-Shoppe revealed itself in a tiny by-street, where the houses leant a little towards one another, as though in gossiping indignation at the incongruous glaring picture-palace, newly erected at the corner. And here was the Booke-Shoppe's dangling sign, that jutted over the wrought-iron lantern in the porch; latticed windows bulging oddly into the street; behind them a sense of dimness . . . this was indeed the Perfect Publisher, from whose shrine one could imagine, without any shrinkings of distaste, the issue of all one's cherished favourites. Gareth fancied himself summoned to the octagonal chamber he was sure lingered behind those squares of thick glass; a chamber at once fragrant and frowsy with cobwebs and the aroma of lingering hopes; everywhere books; books piled and tumbled and tottering on floor and shelf; folios and quartos and duodecimos; classics and lyric poets and Elizabethan drama; rare gems of modern verse and prose. At a table likewise heaped, a wizened figure sitting in a round circle of lamplight; a little smoky old man, with spectacles pushed high up among a bush of untidy white hair, and kindly short-sighted brown eyes

that mused absently on who might be the stranger at the door. Then Gareth would declare his name, and be greeted by a flood of gentle enthusiasm, and an exquisite comprehension of all he had put into "The Round Adventure."

"A somewhat fantastic title, Mr. Temple, but we'll keep it, oh, we'll keep it. My dear lad—you must permit me to call you so—I can't be too proud that you brought your delightful wares to the Booke-Shoppe!" . . . Discussion of contract, terms, advertisement?—perhaps! It was manifestly absurd for Gareth, sixteen years a reader, to hover and hope and dream impossible dreams of publishers; dream as he did in front of that iron swinging sign, on a mellow September evening; dream as might have done the veriest novice in the realm of letters. Gareth should have known better. Besides which, it made him late for dinner.

As it happened, Kathleen was later even than he. But in the parlour of Pacific Villa he found Trixie Worley awaiting him. The apparition was less of a shock than it might have been, had not her spiritual presence already formed a habit of straying into his realm of imagination; he knew just exactly what she was going to say, and how she would say it. . . .

"*Mr.* Temple. A *word* with you. *Privately.*"

"Certainly, Mrs. Worley. Won't you sit down?" She was mauver even than he remembered her. Much mauver. . . .

She shut her eyes, gasped two or three times—then suddenly raised her eyebrows till they shot

out of sight; and proceeded to issue a series of disjointed galvanic shocks.

"*Mr.* Temple. I'm a *moral* woman."

She stopped dead. And he hastened to assure her that he believed this to be the case . . . and wondered what he could have said to lead to the question being raised. "Won't you sit down?" . . . Surely this had not been interpreted in any wrong sense? Her next contribution to the interview seemed to hint the contrary:

"And I believe in the *sanctity* of the marriage law."

"Oh, quite; yes, indeed. . . ." A horrible suspicion flashed through him, that her visit might be the result of a guilty attachment formed for himself; and that these references to holy wedlock were merely preliminary.

"And however much *Fred* admires him, he *has* got a *wife*."

Gareth gave it up. "Who has?"

"*Mr.* Kirby."

Then the object of her affection was that little Maori with the slanting yellow eyes. Gareth felt relieved. But why had he been chosen for father confessor?

"He has—yes—certainly . . . a very beautiful woman!"

("Oh, Lord—perhaps I ought to have left that unsaid!")

"And *you* have a *wife*."

"And you have a husband," . . . he was convinced now that it was a comic game they were playing, in which he had to fulfil his due share. . . .

"Then why doesn't she look *after* him?"

This apparently referred to Kathleen and Fred Worley—an improbable conjunction. Cautiously Gareth waited for more.

"Since *you* seem quite unable to look after *her*."

"Kathleen?"

"It's *against* Fred's express wish that I am here. Even though I've left *two* of his cards outside. With mine."

But these did not seem to her bewildered host very adequate aids to respectability, since the enigma was now meandering backwards to what was from his point of view its most undesirable solution—namely, that Kathleen should console Fred for Trixie's desertion to himself. He did not at all like to be closeted with Trixie against Fred's express wish. And he cursed his own innate courtesy which would not permit him to do other than make a visitor appear welcome in his house.

"Do let me get you a glass of lemonade—or some cake?"

She wagged her head in solemn refusal. "The affair is *bound* to lead——" interminable pause in which the plot thickened like gravy exposed to the chill air . . . "to the *Cream*-Pashionel. They always *do*."

"Look here, Mrs. Worley," Temple crossed to the fireplace, and standing with his back to the grate, faced her with good-humoured determination to break through that awful barrier of mystery, "I honestly haven't the faintest idea what you are so kindly trying to tell me. I'm not clever

at guessing things, you know. Won't you explain ? "

" I'm *breaking* it to you. *Gently,*" said Trixie, still stolidly obscure. And indeed, by the time Gareth had groped through the enmeshing glooms to the heart of the riddle, that Kathleen and Napier Kirby were engaged in a surreptitious love-affair, it scarcely came any more as a reeling shock to his senses. . . .

" *Fred* knows. And *I* know. I should suppose *poor* Grace knows. And everybody except *you.* They have been seen motoring. Embracing. In the neighbourhood. *Mr.* Temple. You have been blind, *indeed.* You must *do* something. Words cannot express my sorrow. And disgust. That such a thing should start under my very roof. Fred *still* admires him, though I say all day : ' *Fred. Don't* admire him ! ' "

She rose to go.

" You must take action at once. *Stern* action. Appeal to her sense of shame. Tell her she's too *old.*" Pregnant interval of silence during the glove-buttoning process. . . . " Can you ?—thanks . . . or are you *too* upset ? . . . Thanks. And tell her—she's above all—a *wife.*"

And Mrs. Worley departed, immensely inflated with the consciousness of having impressively performed an unpleasant duty to her neighbour.

Gareth, left alone with the revelation that Kathleen was all this while deceiving him, that " people were beginning to talk," and " God knows how far the business has gone," Gareth ought no doubt to have aged visibly beneath the deadly

blow, and sat quite, quite still for many hours, with hair turning slowly white.

Gareth experienced a momentary shock, certainly; the Songs his Mother Taught Him were responsible for that: honour and plighted troth, and—perhaps this was his fault; he should have shielded the woman; he had been neglecting her shamefully for the book . . . the book! he had his secret love, why should she not have had hers the while? They needed something—at their age they needed something, when there were no children. He speculated on the personality of Napier Kirby. He had barely come in contact with him, at Rapparee House. Had they been very happy, the guilty pair? Rather, were they at present very happy? since no explanation now was required for Kathleen's unpunctuality. He wished she would come in and tell him all about it; where Kirby had taken her, and what he had said —but Gareth knew that would not do. He must either continue in ignorance, or display the qualities moral decency decreed should in these cases be displayed: indignation, jealousy, insulted honour, "you-shall-not-quit-my-roof," — Gareth hunted about for these tendencies, desperately alarmed to find as substitute a gentle rosy glow of benevolence towards the erring couple, mild curiosity, and a purely whimsical desire to inform Mrs. Worley of the line he intended to take up in the matter.

It would have to be blindness, foolish complacent blindness to what was happening beneath his very eyes. An attitude rather damaging to his

vanity, certainly; but he had failed to make Kathleen happy, and had no right, no right whatever, to rob her of the happiness she had gathered elsewhere. They had dragged on each other long enough; each should now enjoy the last topsy-turvy parcels they each had drawn from the bran-pie of youthful adventure. Gareth knew that before this year's summer he could not have been guilty of such incredible coolness in the face of disaster; but the madness of their holiday time, and then his book . . . he had neglected Kathleen and must pay the price in silence.

Oh, let him at least be frank! Gareth replaced on the mantelpiece a black china cat with glassy yellow stare, which he had been hypnotically regarding, and threw himself in the arm-chair, shading his eyes with his hand. Let him be frank with himself! It was no question of payment—it was deliverance. It was a well-nigh sobbing relief. She was going. After all these hot aching years of strain, fortune in a wild fervour of generosity was tossing him one gift after another, culminating with this: that without any effort of action on his part, he was to be left alone; alone to live his life, and write his books, and . . . dream his dreams of another girl; one who came in a breath of wind as fragrant and as cool, as Kathleen's presence had been a nightmare of harassed tightly-puckered misery. The ethereal mist-maid of his visions had been so much with him of late, slipping in and out of the pages of the book, that he would not have been at all surprised to see her materialize like any Galatea. She had flitted through so many fanciful

love-scenes, that Kathleen by his side at nights gave him an uneasy sense of treachery. If Kathleen were gone, then no one need ever step between him and the love he might have found, once, in youth. Perhaps even now, if he were alone—he half stretched forth his arms, "Oh, my dear, my dear" . . . in a great rush of gratitude for his impending release. He had been so tired, with that patient tiredness which is worst of all; and himself would never have jerked off the yoke; he was the man, the bread-winner—Songs his Mother Taught Him . . . no, Gareth would have kept faith with Kathleen, though it wore away his very life in fretted atoms. But now—he had only not to see.

When Kathleen entered, flushed, and with a certain vibrant quality to tone and gesture, he asked no questions, pretended to be deeply immersed in work; "Extra rush; autumn season." He had never told her about the book; this dream should not be damaged by too close handling. Perhaps, if she went before it appeared in print—it was still more than a third removed from completion—perhaps then he need never tell her. Gareth had dreaded that telling; dreaded her quick practical comments; dreaded the interest she would surely display. He wondered when she and Kirby were planning to make definite escape, and wished—again with a flicker of amusement at the thought of Mrs. Worley—that it would not be such manifest bad form to ask.

The book was not running as swiftly as it had done in Ilfracombe. He believed he might complete it by the end of the year—if he were alone.

September tiptoed so mildly into October, that in London, where berries do not redden in the hedges, the end of summer came as scarcely a shock. The skies were still blue, and the leaves still green ; and if the sun rose an hour or two later, who can tell across London roofs and through London windows ? If the sun dipped an hour or two earlier, so much the better for London lovers, who await longingly the shadows in a city where there is no solitude.

Napier and Kathleen were content to dawdle through the days, curiously heedless whether their intimacy were apparent to all eyes. Napier, indeed, was willing enough that Grace should hear rumours of his errantry . . . he never lost sight of his resentful love for Grace and her provocative indifference, except in very rare moments when Kathleen's veritable monsoons of passion—hot wind from out of the desert—swept away all angry fidelity. Misunderstanding the woman as he did, misunderstanding the esoteric causes for the brilliance and beauty of this her last leap towards the sun, he approved of her extreme recklessness as to discovery, setting it down to a capacity lightly to enjoy a light flirtation, to revel bountifully in the fun which the passing moment yields to its devotees ; her stormier moods he attributed to the devastating power of his own fascination. Naïve glee at his ability to inspire such genuine emotion, mingled with a somewhat unpleasant, perhaps even racial desire that he could all the while shout to Grace : " There you are ! *There* you are ! " . . . making her a present of Kathleen's

body and soul, in order that Grace might better appreciate him, the recipient of these.

He owned, quite apart from the large house in Hamilton Terrace where his official family life was spent, a set of bachelor chambers off Jermyn Street, and here Kathleen and he often passed their evenings. The furniture of these rooms was amusing to her critical faculty: perfect unobtrusive taste of an English gentleman; every article expensive with the careless air of costing next to nothing; yet here and there, where Napier's secret preferences had willy-nilly broken through his layer of acquired good form, were spurts of gaudy colour: a bead-embroidered cushion . . . scarlet and gold piano-cover he had draped with much pride and festooned with a large tinsel rose . . . a couple of gold-framed pictures of very pink-and-white nudes with plenty of hair . . . things that cost next to nothing with a shrieking air of being expensive.

But Kathleen loved just those awful pictures and the tinsel rose, with the same tenderness she had once poured on to Gareth's smaller failings—before these failings had become her daily companions.

And it was good to lie on the couch with her head on the satin cushion—his cushion—while he sang to her . . . jumble of opera, and crooning lullaby, and those husky bitter-sweet melodies that never sound quite human, but rather as the plaint of love itself, or wail of exile. . . .

Then he would stop singing, and laugh, and soothe her with his kisses . . . cuddle her as if she

were a silly child, and pet her . . . who had ever before shown the temerity to pet Kathleen? And how she worshipped him for it . . . worshipped his feline caresses.

On a certain Sunday of mid-October, Napier took her for a day's motoring in the country lanes of Surrey. He was in excellent humour, in anticipation of a trip to Spain, where he was entered for the great International Automobile Race to be held within a fortnight. Napier had little doubt but that he would come out victor in the contest; and Kathleen, noting his marvellous handling of the car, adjustment so swift and delicate as to be well-nigh instinctive to every emergency of road and traffic, Kathleen shared his confidence, and exulted in the man who was master of his job. For the time being, in the exhilaration of their rush out of London into a world that was bright and ruddy and clear-edged, nature's last abundant fling of colour and warmth before the closing-in, she succeeded in forgetting his impending departure. They lunched sumptuously at Dorking, and then leapt on again, eating up the curl of the road with incredible speed. . . . Napier's golden eyes were fixed straight ahead of him—his mouth smiled—and he hummed a tune that throbbed with a queer barbaric dissonance. . . .

"What is it?" asked Kathleen, fascinated.

"Moorish. I picked it up when I was touring in Spain. Did I ever tell you, Kathleen, that I'd been a chauffeur for five months?"

And he related, with infinite zest at recollection, how some people had wished to hire from him a

car and chauffeur for an exhaustive trip through Spain, during his first struggling years in the motor business ; all the men in his service already booked, he yet had not dared to refuse so advantageous an offer, and had boldly undertaken the job himself, with all its attendant duties of guide and bottle-washer—" And Lordy ! how that country twisted itself round the very core of my heart ! "

So thus was explained his sudden thrilling inflection when, during their first conversation at Ilfracombe, he had spoken of Granada, and the hill called The Last Sigh of the Moor. . . . " I'd like to stand with you just there, and look down on the Alhambra. . . ."

Why not, then ? Why not ? Throughout the rest of the afternoon she was strung to vibrant expectation of his : " Come with me, Kathleen ! " . . .

Perhaps now he would say it ; now, in the mellow inn-garden where they had tea, and watched the sun drop, a spinning red globe, through the opalescent October mists.

But though Napier talked excitedly, incessantly, of his vagabondage in Spain ; fluent description of just what had attracted him : the lazy Southern people with their courtly ways—the clear rich colours—the voluptuous sunshine—over all, a sense of dignified repose, quiescent to the memory of past greatness in history ; though he talked so much and so long that by the time they started for home, the chill of evening had crept up dankly over the landscape ; yet he did not say : " Come with me, Kathleen. . . ."

A moaning breeze rustled the foliage that clung faithfully to the boughs, reminding them that the day's generous flare of crimson and wine-colour and topaz had been the merest bravado . . . and that winter was coming soon, very soon—Kathleen shivered a little, and drew her cloak tightly round her; the cushioned seats of the car felt soggy, and some withered leaves had blown in. . . . And still Napier talked of Spain, and the Moors in Spain, and castles in Spain, and himself in Spain—with never a word of her in Spain; never a word. . . .

"I've got to go home to dinner to-night, darling; shall I put you down near Hammersmith or——"

She did not want to go home. The panic she was just succeeding in holding at arm's length, would surely find her at Pacific Villa.

She could easily fashion some careless lie to explain her absence to Gareth; the same lie she always used to cover those long evenings at the flat: she was going to the Worleys; they were teaching her bridge; would Gareth care to come too?—she risked the danger of an affirmative, knowing how busy he was of late, how he disliked bridge, how he disliked Trixie. Anyway, he appeared curiously apathetic towards her doings since their summer holiday.

"I don't want any dinner, Nap. Drop me at the flat, and join me later on, can you?"

He assented; but half-heartedly. It was wonderful to be going to Spain; wonderful to win the Cup Race—for he fully intended to win it by dex

terous combinations of skill, recklessness, and foul play ; wonderful that the feat was one which could be performed showily in sight of the multitude. Nothing was wanting to his anticipations of glory, save a special audience of his wife. Yes, Grace must be persuaded to come with him next week. He planned for a reconciliation to take place between them this very evening. . . . And afterwards he would sit blissfully with her beautiful auburn head against his knee, and make plans for their second honeymoon, along the Guadalquiver. . . . And he would describe to her just how splendid she would feel, seeing him outrival all competitors in the great race.

Yes, Grace must come with him to Spain. He wanted it. Usually he got what he wanted. He drove to Hamilton Terrace and dressed for dinner, in a riot of triumphant anticipation. . . .

A couple of hours later saw him, ominously silent, and with a curious glint under his heavy eyelids, letting himself into the flat where Kathleen awaited him. Grace had refused his request, quite calmly and good-temperedly ; had said it would bore her. . . .

And here was a dark woman with arms strangling his neck . . . overwhelming him in a tide of words . . . pleading, pleading that when he went to Spain, she might not be left behind. Pleading, as one pleads who for two solitary hours has been in desperate battle with the spectre of an old dread.

"I won't stay here—I won't. Napier, you promised, if ever you went South. . . . You said : 'One day we'll go together.' And this is 'one

day,' isn't it ? isn't it ? Let me see you race and win. Take me along. Napier, you promised . . . and I love you. . . . I won't face the grey days, and the white days, and the thick yellow days. You were so long coming this evening . . . and it was cold and dark—my hands are numb with cold. . . . A hateful ballad-singer started croaking outside : ' Fallin' leaf and fadin' tree——' . . . She did, Napier, she did ! and I couldn't bear it. . . . I wanted to kill her. Take me with you to Spain . . . to see you win ! "

For through all her stammering anguish was sufficient acumen left to strike again and again that final note, as the surest means of reaching his ear.

He bent back her head, so that her mouth lay beneath his. And she felt rather than saw his smile . . . evil flash of smile, white in a dusky face. . . .

(" Dear old Nap, it would bore me stiff ; I hate travelling——")

" Yes. You shall come with me," he assured Kathleen softly.

. . . . . .

Kathleen was afire with excitement when that evening she alighted from the Hammersmith omnibus. Over and done with now, the strain and pretence and irritation of life with Gareth. Humdrum day succeeding day ; monotony that his futile comings and goings were powerless to dispel. Panic-peopled realms of thought : winter-fear, birthday-dread—realm that she could not even claim as solely hers, since instinctively he was

familiar with every shape therein—all over and done with. Warm land, warm love; her old tormented nature cast like the garment of a snake. In ten days' time. Morality, humour, common sense, stubbornly thrust under, lest they should reveal flaws and dangers in this glory of the future towards which doggedly she thrust her indomitable will. Nine more evenings to walk up that hideous front garden, to unlock that blistered door, look in the dining-room to see if Gareth were still up—her lip curved scornfully at the reflection that never once had he betrayed sufficient intelligence to note her altered demeanour.

She opened the dining-room door. The lamp was smoking badly. She attempted with smarting eyes to pierce the fog.

Gareth was sitting at the table, his head propped on his hands; staring, staring straight in front of him, with the look of a man to whom has just happened the worst thing of all. Before him in a pile stood the usual array of brown-paper-bound manuscripts which he brought back from the office; one lay strewn on the floor, white patches on the dingy carpet. Somebody must have thrown it there.

"Has anything happened, Gareth? Aren't you feeling well?"

He gazed at and through her, as if she were not there.

"Gareth, did you hear me? Has anything happened?"

After a long pause, her presence seemed to penetrate to him, as a buzzing element of which he must at all costs be quit.

"Go to bed, Kathleen. I'm quite all right." His voice was dull and toneless.

She could not be bothered with him that night of nights; he, of the old order of things. . . . Kathleen closed the door; went happily upstairs.

And Gareth was left with his pile of other people's books, and the one among them that contained his idea.

"The Reverse of the Medal," by Pat O'Neill.

Who was Pat O'Neill? He neither knew nor cared. Obviously a new writer, since the name was unfamiliar. For that reason, Gareth had selected it for reading first of the number, in the hope of striking something original. . . . Well, he had succeeded; Gareth had long since been convinced of the originality of his own inspiration.

The perusal of the opening chapters evoked a keen scholarly pleasure in the masterly handling of phrases, for the unmistakable genius displayed in character and thought. . . . And all the while, a curious unreal sensation, as if he were being dragged along unfamiliar paths towards a spot of which he was perfectly cognizant, would recognize the instant he set eyes on it; only the way thither was not known to him. . . . The nightmare feeling grew and grew—he was stifling truth in a blurred rapid horror of reading—on and on—unmistakably aware now to what summit of inspiration each phrase, each situation, was leading. . . .

A last effort of frantic unconvinced self-persuasion that he was mistaken, the next page would show him so—well then, the next chapter; he had his own book so much on his mind, that it infected

absurdly everything he read ; this other, this Pat O'Neill, was labouring towards an entirely different issue ; funny that in places it should appear so like.

Half-way through the manuscript, no more possibility of doubt. It was then that the white staring pages found their scattered resting-place on the carpet.

His idea.

In his official capacity, he would have to compose a report to send up to Leslie Campbell, who would probably publish the book. An astoundingly good piece of work, he would have to report well on it.

His idea.

Not for an instant could he accuse the unknown author of deliberate plagiarism. No ; these brain-waves occurred at times. He had heard several cases of two books or two plays each founded on the same theme, evolved at the same period by their totally unconscious creators. In this case, the other man would get in first, that was all. And it mattered so intensely to Gareth.

Drearily he stared at the black china cat with yellow eyes, who occupied the centre of the mantel-piece, just where the faded red velvet with its brownish fringe was looped up with a nail.

" What am I to do ? "

The cat leered evilly : " You might give the book a bad report ; then the Heart-breaker would tie it up in a parcel, and, whistling, carry it to the post."

" Another firm will publish it if Campbell doesn't. There's a good two months' work in

mine still. 'The Reverse of the Medal' is bound to get in first."

"Then keep back the manuscript," counselled the black china cat, who had presided so long on that shelf in that room, that it must in witnessing, have sucked into its unaired soul all of the bickerings and heart-burnings of the two dwelling in Pacific Villa, and all of the things unsaid that hung thickly in the air long after the dining-room was empty of occupants. A nasty little cheap black cat, meagre and dusty.

"Then keep back the manuscript."

"Keep it back?"

"Well, why not?"

It did occasionally last a couple of months before the reader sent up his report of a book. Not often; Gareth was regular in the discharge of his duties. Moreover, every manuscript received at the office was of course duly notified with date and title. But it might easily happen that in this case the copy should be accidentally mislaid, mislaid for quite a length of time.

And in the meanwhile he would work; work feverishly at his own book. Finish it in six weeks. Finish it, and submit it to a publisher, any publisher, so only that it got in first.

Why not?

"It's—mean," said Gareth to the black china cat.

"I don't care one way or another," the latter retorted indifferently. "Go back to the old routine, day after day, and nothing ahead to look forward to. Dreams smashed. Career in atoms.

Shoved on one side by 'Campbell's Young Men.' Just tolerated by Campbell himself——"

"Ah, no—I can't!" The man buried his head on his arms, while a great bitterness drained his soul. Forty years, and nothing to show for them—and now to have success snatched away when it dangled within grasping reach. "I can't!"

. . . Gareth looked too long into the shallow eyes of the black china cat. . . .

"Pat O'Neill must pay for pitching on the same idea as mine," he said at last, slowly. And slowly gathered up the scattered manuscript, sheet by sheet. Slowly crossed to the desk, and opened the lowest drawer, and thrust in the untidy parcel; crushed it down, and shut the drawer, and locked it.

When he mounted the creaking stairway to the room he shared with Kathleen, there were ugly lines around his mouth, a hard glitter in his eyes. And he was vexed to see her smiling in her sleep.

CHAPTER VII

THE lantern was out, that had burnt in the heart of the world.

Gareth was quite defenceless in face of this smashing thing which had occurred to him. He had no philosophy or religion to which to cling; no inner store of strength and pride. Nor was there any person to whom blindly he could turn, and say: "Help me!" He had not even the vicious satisfaction of feeling that his present misery was due payment for something tangible which had been his to enjoy; nothing had been his but moonshine, and moonshine is but poor stuff to feed on in retrospect.

Gareth, who had been hurt, looked about for somebody to hurt.

Kathleen's unnatural and feverish excitement, the prevailing atmosphere about her of impending happenings, stabbed him with a sense of unbearable injury. For sixteen years they had been unhappy together, he and she; since two and a half months, found each their separate happiness. And now his had evaporated—and hers remained. More, was obviously reaching its consummation.

Gareth had always been possessed of an instinctive understanding where Kathleen was concerned. Now he marked her sudden tremulous

smiles; her abstracted moods, in which trivial mishaps mattered not at all; the state of mind in which she woke of a morning to a day which meant something, brought something nearer. All these tokens of an earth beatified, maddened him with the memory of his loss. Once, like a very human child, he cried out to whosoever was responsible: "If you could only have left me mine, I would have *wanted* everyone to have theirs as well!" and then Kathleen hummed a little tune as she came in from an evening stroll; and Gareth said without looking up, "Where have you been?"

She lied carelessly. Went on lying, as he continued to question. The fact that she did not even labour to evolve a credible tissue of falsehood, that the web was full of holes and gaps whence any intelligent man might with ease tear the fabric to shreds, infuriated him more than anything else could have done; convinced him more than anything else how little he counted in her, in other people's eyes. "We needn't bother about Gareth. Gareth was always a weak fool!" . . . he could hear Kathleen's scornful intonation, see Napier's flashing smile in response. And "Campbell's Young Men" caught up the tone and the laugh; till the world was one cruel casual voice that repeated "We needn't bother about Gareth." . . .

And the achievement which would have justified him—the book? Gareth was writing feverishly, neglecting his office work, writing at every spare moment, early morning and late night. The

hollows in his cheeks became more apparent ; his eyes deeper sunken in their sockets. He was writing against time ; writing against that thing which lay in the bottom drawer of his desk. The girl whose touch was cool came to him no more ; the dusty black china cat watched him glassily from the mantelshelf. And Kathleen came in and out, and lied to him as if it were not worth while.

He guessed that her crisis was near at hand. From a certain crafty observance, newly and strangely acquired, he was able to deduce the date of the actual flight. Kathleen made no elaborate provisions that he should that evening be out of the way. She evidently intended to pack her trunk during the day, when he was at the office ; send it in advance of her to Charing Cross ; and trust to his amiability, stupidity—to let her depart without enquiries : " I'm going for a walk, Gareth." In anticipation he saw her eyes sparkling to an image beyond his bowed shoulders at the dining-room table ; not caring if he heard her farewell or not. And he had drudged for her sixteen years.

After all, a certain amount was due to him on such an occasion. He was willing to let them go, yes ; but could they not betray fear of being found out ? take some pains to elude his vigilance ? pay him tribute of stammering subterfuge and sidelong anxious looks ? This drama of three had been performed so often—but this time two showed a disposition to cut out the part of the third altogether.

For the past fortnight, Kathleen had creamed

her neck and arms every night before going to bed ; and before the glass she brushed and brushed at her long black hair till the grey threads glittered ; she also attempted to soften by massage the network of tiny wrinkles beneath her eyes, and the two drawn lines at each corner of the mouth. She was still a handsome woman, with the old suggestion of a wilder redder strain than the Saxon in her delicate aquiline nose, high cheekbones, and lithe body. But forty-three carries its mark. Gareth lay in bed and watched her efforts to remove them. She could not help that, since it was also his room. But he felt it a supreme insolence, this attempt before his very eyes at rejuvenescence for her lover. He wanted to tell her so . . . knew there was some reason why he must pretend to be unaware of anything impending. What reason ? . . . Why, yes, of course, he wanted her to go—but it required an effort to remember this, with nerves rasped to their present condition.

On the eve of the decisive Friday, Gareth returned early from the office, shivering from head to foot, racking pains just above his eyes, hands burning, and with an insistent dry cough from his chest. His chest, never strong, had not been sufficiently wrapped up in view of the recent October mists.

" I'm not well," he muttered, as he walked swayingly up the stairs to the bedroom. " Not well," and sat on the edge of the bed, and pressed his hot fingers to his hot eyelids, and repeated a great many times " Her touch is as cold as the

sand in a cave . . . her touch is as cold as the sand in a cave." . . . Oh, why did she never come to him now, his dream-girl? Never since that pile of manuscript lay buried in the bottom drawer of his desk. He could not afford to be ill—suddenly starting to his feet; he had to finish his book; at any moment Pat O'Neill might walk in and demand to know what had become of "The Reverse of the Medal"? Gareth's days at the office were haunted by the swinging of the glass door, perpetual fear of who might be the entering figure. So many strangers came to the firm of Leslie Campbell. And now, when his pen might be licking up the yards and miles of words he saw stretching ahead of him till the last chapter be reached—now he was ill, and had to waste the precious moments sitting on the edge of the bed, and coughing—coughing.

Kathleen entered, her arms laden with parcels. She started and dropped the largest of them, seeing Gareth.

"You! home so early!"

"I'm not well," he explained piteously. He noticed the parcels; guessed at their contents. She must have passed a delicious afternoon, spending all her little store of money. He guessed, too, that she was eager to unpack them, toy with the contents, try on the dainty feminine apparel by which she sought to hide her years from that other. Well, she could just attend to his wants instead; it would not be for many hours longer.

"You'd better go to bed," said Kathleen.

"Yes." He did not move.

"Come along then. This is only one of your usual chills. You'll be better to-morrow."

"I don't suppose I shall be well enough to go to the office."

He marked her quick start of dismay, and a tiny streak of comfort crept into his desolation. So at last he was proving slightly inconvenient, was he?

"Do you think I shall be well enough, Kathleen?"

"Not unless you get at once between the blankets." She wondered how much longer he would sit motionless on the edge of the bed, looking at her. Not that Gareth's doings really counted for much, entirely swamped as she was in her obsession of late love—but how like Gareth just at this time to catch a chill; she did not know whether to be amused or impatient at the intrusion of poultice and syrup on the gold-shot sublimity of her thoughts. She attended to the patient; he recognizing in her every movement an insistent determination to cure him sufficiently that he should leave the coast clear on the morrow. He was glad to be causing her trouble at last. Of course she must be allowed to go—through all his fever and irritation and muddle of desire, he strove to cling to that. He wanted her to go. It was as well that the drama was to be soon played to the finish; he was not at all certain how long he could retain his attitude of utter passivity.

Kathleen lay wide awake all through the night. At intervals she heard Gareth cough; could not

tell if he slept or not ; hoped for the best ; it had not before occurred to her to take Gareth into consideration. But it was essential that no hitch should occur in her plan of escape. An hysterical fatalism brooded over her passion for Napier Kirby. She knew that if she hesitated once, paused to debate or analyse, looked beyond the actual moment of flight, or looked back to responsibility, habit, sentiment, then the sequence of events which had rushed to ten-thirty, Charing Cross, Friday evening, would pass by that single pin-point moment of action, never to touch it again. And she would be left. Forty-three cannot shatter and re-form her life, lose opportunities and find others, toss love aside and gather up love, as eighteen might do, as twenty-seven had done.

Gareth was not asleep ; he tossed and coughed throughout that endless night, and wished he were alone, and that his head had not made every corner of the pillow such a burning discomfort. . . . " Her touch is as cold as the sand in a cave " —perhaps, when Kathleen had gone, leaving the room and the house empty, perhaps then his cool girl would return to him, bringing with her the old dreams of peace. Kathleen was going to-morrow.

He appeared rather better in the morning, but still feverish. Quite out of the question to breathe the raw gusty air outside, awhirl with crackling dancing leaves from the half-stripped branches.

" I'll have a fire put in the dining-room, Gareth. You'll be more comfortable there than here."

He shook with a queer desire to startle her by

saying "Don't let my presence hinder your packing, my dear." Her crude attempts to remove him from the bedroom were an insult to his intelligence. She would lose that proneness to look through and beyond him, if he said "Don't let my presence . . ." for fear of saying it, he shuffled into his worn dressing-gown, and went hastily downstairs; sat in the arm-chair, and looked at the black china cat, and listened to Kathleen's footsteps to and fro in the room above; opening drawers and cupboards; a pause while she folded a garment; movement of carrying it to the trunk. He made an effort to write at the book, but his head swam and he gave up trying. The day dragged on. Once he called for the servant to bring some more coal. Kathleen answered the summons, and attended to the fire abstractedly. Her cheeks were stained a rich carmine.

"Where's Maggie?"

"Maggie? Oh, I gave her permission to go out."

"Why? It isn't her day."

"She looked pale. I thought it would do her good."

"You mean," said Gareth—nearly—"that you sent her out to be rid of her while you pack."

He just withheld the speech; but with a sense that he was all the while being robbed of a privilege. Kathleen's manner was goading him to frenzy. He wanted her to know—know—*know* that he knew; that he could, if he wished, reveal her every falsehood, make her look the fool instead of himself. As it was, she would leave the house

thinking him the dupe ; continue always to think so. . . . Gareth writhed impotently. Somewhere in this old tired conjunction of one and two, was a magnificent effect for the third : at the eleventh hour to fling off pretence of ignorance, denounce the culprits, and claim his—property. " You mustn't ! You mustn't ! " twanged the last coherent fibre of his brain. But surely any after-forfeits would be worth the paying, just to stamp that superior exalted smile from Kathleen's lips ; make her realize the fact of him, his existence and his claims.

She talked rapidly and jerkily at supper, but ate nothing. She might have been talking to anyone. Gareth said, " Can you give me a glass of something hot, Kath, when I'm in bed to-night ? I want to be well by to-morrow."

" Yes, of course. I wouldn't go to bed too early if I were you "—no, not while her trunk stood packed in the room !—" or you'll find it hard to sleep."

" . . . What does that matter to you, since you won't be here ? " Some demon surely was prompting him with all these sentences that he might not utter ; he threw a swift furtive look towards the black cat with yellow eyes.

Kathleen rose and went to her room. Towards half-past nine, listening intently, he heard wheels that stopped a little way down the road. The cab !—he sat with fingers tightly gripping the chair. Heavy steps crunching to the front door. Kathleen, running softly downstairs to meet the cabman, shut, in passing, the dining-room door.

"Kathleen!"

She looked in. "Yes?"

"Why did you do that?" querulously.

"I don't want you to feel a draught."

"Who's there?"

She made vague response, "Man about the bathroom tap"; and closed the door again.

"Bathroom tap" . . . Gareth laughed ironically. Then stopped laughing, confronted of a sudden by the utter ignominy of a man who sat and drowsed in a dressing-gown over the fire, while his mate was in the very act of leaving him. Straining forward in his chair, he heard the cabby lurch downstairs with the trunk on his shoulder. A pause. Then Kathleen again entered, in hat and coat.

"I'm going out, Gareth."

He did not turn. "At this time? Why?"

. . . Just a minute longer. If he can hang on to silence a minute longer. . . . The half-dead fire shifted. He felt her stop on the threshold to answer his question.

"It's such a fine night. I wanted a stroll."

A screaming gust of wind and rain shook and rattled at the panes—and a fibre of Gareth's brain seemed to twitch and snap. A fine night . . . what sort of an idiot did she take him for? He would show her.

"You lie. You were going to join your lover."

. . . Not even now was he sure if he had said it, or if that absurd little black china cat were still playing its tricks. His back was to the door. He waited to hear it close behind her. That

would indicate that all was well, and that she had gone. No sound. He turned . . . saw from her face that it had not been the black china cat who had spoken the words :

" You lie. You were going to join your lover."

Her smile had slipped away—and quite right that it should !—smile that belonged to eighteen, not to forty-three. And she was aware of him now, Gareth noted exultantly ; was waiting in stunned amaze for his next utterance. Well, since he had once broken bounds, it might come in full force, dramatic recrimination he had all this while suppressed. He had lost all sense of consequences, of the ultimate issue at stake ; seized, for the second time in his life, by an irresistible storm of action. Just on and on, not seeing whether he was going—and who could now assert that Gareth Temple wasn't a strong man !

" You thought I saw nothing, did you ? thought I swallowed all your stupid little lies ; held me for stupider than the lies, did you ? Well, I know. You were going to-night—not coming back—packing your clothes . . . all those weeks you've been plotting it, you—with that smile forever on your face, and making yourself beautiful, for him ; and buying clothes, for him. And I knew ! I knew ! For every falsehood you gave me, I gave you back another with my silence. Not—not quite such a fool as you took me to be, Kathleen . . ."

He was forced to stop, overtaken by a spasm of coughing ; clutched for support at the corner of the table.

Kathleen had time to recover from her first numbness of surprise. The expected hitch to her plans had occurred. No matter! she could cope with more than this for the attainment of El Dorado. Gareth could not prevent her departure; let him but have his say, so it be a quick one; and then——

A noisy rapping at the front door indicated that the cabby had deposited his load on the vehicle, and was waiting to take his fare. Still coughing, Gareth brushed past Kathleen, and into the hall.

"You can bring the box back here," she heard him say. "You won't be wanted to-night after all."

She made no movement to contradict. Short of undignified strugglings and vituperations on her part, she saw that for the moment he controlled the situation. She did not for an instant waver in her stubborn confidence still to reach Charing Cross that night in time for the ten-thirty. But that Gareth should dare thwart her; Gareth of all people; Gareth, the urging of whom to initiative had well-nigh sapped her of her own, now by initiative to shatter and frustrate her hopes; Gareth's interference was unbearable.

He re-entered the room, well pleased with the decisive action he had just taken. Her eyes snapped fire at him from the shadow of her youthful, too youthful, brown picture-hat.

"Have I been so happy with you?"

"That's beside the point," sternly.

"Is it? Is it?"

"You happen to be mine."

"You can't stop me, if I wish to go."

She heard the cab rattling down the street, dying to silence. She would have to walk till she found another—scarce in that neighbourhood. Supposing that by the time she reached Charing Cross, the ten-thirty would have throbbed out of the station, and Napier with it; Napier, thinking her trust had at the last moment failed. A bitter foreboding of loss clouded her eyes . . . the chance would not come to her again. Gareth, watching, thought it was thus he must have looked when the other book had crashed across his dream. And now they were both unhappy again, he and she, as they had always been; he would not have to hear her hum that maddening little tune to-night, while she creamed her arms and shoulders. To-night . . . then she would still be here! . . . a chill misgiving struck at his satisfaction. He lashed himself up again.

"You seem to have no sense of shame," he flung at her.

"He wanted me." And for a fleeting instant she was again happy, thinking so. Gareth marked the beginning of—that smile.

"Are you sure?" he remarked slowly. "Of course I know little of the man—and wish to know less. But he struck me as being rather dangerously in love with his own wife. You and I. . . . we are neither of us very young any more, Kathleen. He may have flattered you, played with you, but——"

"She didn't care for him—didn't care . . ."

"That's why. You cared too much."

She cut in, fearing the next: "If he hadn't wanted me, would he have asked me to go South with him?"

"*Did* he ask? Didn't you rather drive it through, doggedly, blindly, because you yourself so much desired it? Thrash it through and flog it, and force it? The man . . . I've seen you force things through, Kathleen."

He had said it, what she had all the time endeavoured to hide from herself. And now there was no question of El Dorado. Gareth again! destroying even the aftermath, so that she could never dwell on the episode, on memory of Napier's voice and caresses, without hot stinging shame. To cheapen herself, give herself where she was not ardently desired. . . . Kathleen withdrew the pins from her hat, and laid the broad-brimmed felt upon the table. Then she sat down; and Gareth sat down opposite; and the black china cat prepared itself for some innocent enjoyment. There were things to be said which had remained unspoken for years. It would be good to clear the air. And they were both out to wound, wound and hack and tear. It is not a pleasant frame of mind which visits a man and a woman from whom the last dreams have been wantonly snatched.

"It was perfect at Alpenruh, wasn't it?" said Kathleen, rending the first veil.

"And never since."

"You loved me then—or didn't you?"

"Perhaps. Calf-love, moon-love, flimsy stuff

that couldn't stand the years. We should not have tried to keep it up."

"I told you so, beforehand."

"I stuck to it, at least. You were running away—to another man."

"No woman could wish to stay with you. You can't *do* things; something rotten always gives way in you at the critical moment. One can't even lean on you, because you sway, sway and totter." . . . Quick revenge this, on Gareth, who had pointed out her humiliation. She went on: "Other men have passed you, again and again; young men, men with energy, men with genius. You've got left behind—you, weak on the chest, weak in the knees, weak everywhere. And you're always there, that's the worst of you—always there. Why shouldn't I have tried to leave you? You have brought me nothing, not even the right to be proud of you. It must be wonderful for a woman to be proud of her man's strength."

And quivering from the stripes her tongue inflicted, he stammered in answer to the final word of abuse.

"But I stopped you to-night—I stopped you——" Then hadn't he even here shown a man's strength? Had he botched this triumph as well? The child in him wailed its disappointment.

"You stopped me, yes," she gave a hard little laugh; "but not because you sent the cab away, my friend, so don't you believe it." And lest she might ever have to hear a repetition of his insinuation that she had "forced things through,"

Kathleen added: "I don't think to-night need be mentioned again, between us two."

"But——"

Maggie, the general servant, tapped at the door and entered, in Sunday hat and jacket.

"Please, ma'am," eyes round with astonishment, "there's your trunk a-standing in the passage. Stumbled over it, I did, when I come in from outside. An' I wondered——"

"It can go up to the bedroom." Kathleen disdainfully withheld explanation. "It isn't heavy, Maggie. I'll give you a hand with it."

Maggie backed.

"Oh, and Maggie, put on some hot milk, will you, for the master? and pour a little brandy into it; a teaspoonful."

Gareth stood listening to the bumping on the stairs, as the box was carried back to its old quarters. The fever of his mood had ebbed, till nothing remained of the glow and the exhilaration. He only knew he was tired and rather chilly; that Kathleen had not gone—would still be with him to-morrow, and all the days; between them that new barrier of silence, denser even than the old they had in their recent anger battered down. . . . "I don't think to-night need be mentioned again."

If he had waited one half-minute longer. Certainly it had been a good hour. But had he realized that his burden would in consequence be fastened on him for the rest of his life, he might perhaps have waited that half-minute longer. . . .

In the bedroom upstairs, Kathleen stood at the

window; behind her, the locked trunk and the untidy litter of packing. The dark wind whistled dismally, tore at the branches that swayed and bent and creaked resistance. The air was awhirl with fluttering patches and tatters. Kathleen shivered as she felt the malevolent draughts blowing in between the chinks, and down the chimney and under the door. What a restless shrieking tormented world, this last night of October!

Kathleen shivered. . . . "Shadders risin' 'twixt you an' me"—croaked an echo of the raucous tones of the street-singer outside Napier's rooms. . . . Was Napier on his way South?

She heard Gareth coughing below.

Then she moved away from the window, and her eye caught the calendar hanging on the wall; a cheap calendar, containing a picture of kittens playing, and under it the date—November 30th.

November 30th? . . . In the defiant joy of departure, she had that morning ripped off from the block a whole handful of leaves; since what mattered the time of year, when she would be in warm lands?

Panic-stricken, she now tore at the little strip of paper, and the one beneath it, and then several at a time . . . December—December 20th—only to get through till the summer months came round again—December 31st—that was the last one, gummed to the cardboard; she could not remove it . . . December 31st.

And the winter-fear was on her.

PART III

CHAPTER I

"WHAT are you doing, Gareth?"

"Reading. Do you want anything, dear?"

"No. Do you always prefer to read in that special position?"

He made no reply. He was very gentle now with Kathleen; very considerate. Perhaps his high-coloured boyish notions of ideal knighthood were never so nearly realized in him as during the present uncomplaining acceptance of his self-imposed life-sentence.

Kneeling before the desk in the dining-room, he bent his head once more over the pile of type-script so engrossing him. His shoulders were hunched between Kathleen and the open lower drawer, as if to conceal from her its contents.

"You'll strain your eyes, so far from the light."

Apparently he did not hear.

Sighing restlessly, she rose and went into the kitchen, on the pretext of helping Maggie with the potatoes. At least, the kitchen was always warm—a species of thick concentrated warmth; whereas the arc of heat spread by the dining-room fire was slashed across and across by evil currents of cold

air, entering by who knows what mysterious loopholes of Pacific Villa. Huddled in her enormous grey shawl, Kathleen looked as if removed by years from the radiant creature in the brown picture-hat, of five weeks before. She had never heard again from Napier. . . . But the newspapers had informed her who had won the International Automobile Cup Race. . . . She had never had any doubt of it. Sometimes she wondered if any of his pleasure in the achievement had been marred by lack of her as audience ; and whether he would attempt to communicate with her on his return. . . .

He did not.

. . . . . .

Reluctantly quitting Spain, Napier had fortified regret by buoyant self-assurance that things would be " all right " with Grace, now he was coming back to her in a dazzle of glory. The Cup was bound to make all the difference. . . . She could not but welcome him in the proper spirit of femininity towards victory. " That was a narrow shave I had ! " contemplating the momentary folly which had caused him to invite Kathleen to go with him ; and his subsequent relief when at the eleventh hour she had inexplicably failed to turn up.

" She'd have been an awful nuisance. . . ."

He intended to make Grace a present of the Cup. And pictured her delight. . . .

. . . . . .

" Dap cobes back to-borrow," announced old Mrs. Kirby, quite superfluously, for the fiftieth time.

"Oh *Lord*!" groaned Teddy, "won't he swank just!" He added discontentedly: "We were quite all right without him. Yesterday was huge sport—I like Pater ever so much better than Nap."

Grace yawned, and stretched her arms languidly behind her head.

"Never mind, Teddums—we need only listen once each to the tale of How I Pulled It Off. But it's a pity . . . he'd have been so much more reticent if he had lost. . . ."

. . . . . .

"The Round Adventure" was within a few chapters of completion. But through all his hours of frenzied toil, its author knew the spell of creation had snapped on the night "The Reverse of the Medal" was among the pile of manuscripts submitted to his judgment. What he now composed was bad stuff compared to the earlier portion of the book. Nevertheless the idea, the central idea, would be sufficient to pull it through to success, if—if he got in with it first. . . . A furtive look towards the bottom drawer, and Gareth wrote on. Sick sometimes with loathing of his own meanness, he wrote on.

The manuscript in the bottom drawer obsessed him entirely. His eyes flew in that direction whenever he entered the room; fastened themselves mechanically on the cheap metal handle, each time he paused in his labours to worry out some knotty point. Directly some household trifle, dishcloth or corkscrew, was mislaid, he waited resignedly for Kathleen to say: "I'll just see if it can possibly

have slipped into the bottom drawer of the desk;" and then: "Gareth, did you know that somebody's book has been accidentally shoved away to the back of this drawer? You had better take it up to the office to-morrow. . . ."

Nor were his daylight hours made pleasanter by the momentary expectation of Alexander's annoyed tones: "Temple, I've just had an enquiry respecting a MS. entitled—ah, yes, "The Reverse of the Medal." I believe that you. . . ."

Thank goodness, Campbell at least was away till the New Year.

The black china cat was exceedingly amused by all these futile terrors. His opinion of Gareth in the criminal line might be summed up by the one word "amateurish." Far beyond his loathing of himself, Gareth loathed that mean dusty little cat with the glassy yellow stare. Pat O'Neill stood third on the list of hatred. At the beginning of things he had stood first—but that was before Gareth had read the second half of "The Reverse of the Medal."

He was reading it when Kathleen wandered into the kitchen to peel potatoes. He went on reading, held by the same subtle fascination as had drawn him unwillingly to the pile of type-script. In style, "The Reverse of the Medal" was a complete contrast to "The Round Adventure." Pat O'Neill was evidently no word-spinner; lacked that tender magic of the sound and shape and colour of phrase which was so essentially Gareth's. O'Neill disdained words and was impatient of phrases; he was racingly in love with ideas, and lingered to

swaddle them by language as much only as was barely necessary for interpretation to the reader. The author galloped his idea from the first page to the last, as a cavalryman might do astride of a horse from whom all burdensome equipment has been stripped. Then was Pat O'Neill himself Robert Nugent, the hero of the novel; the man so magnetic, so clear of brain, so full of ordinary human exasperating faults, of unexpected laughter, that his swift death in the last chapter caused a shock of rising tears to Gareth as he read of it. The theme now lay proven: that who lives his life as a conscious experience, must equally in this spirit accept death—more than accept it—go voluntarily to meet it . . . even if he has from the very beginning carried deeply the panic of death in his soul.

Yes. . . . Robert Nugent realized that there are two sides to a medal, as Kay Rollinson had seen the downward as well as the upward curve to completion of a circle. And both had met with death by water—the one boldly, in fear of death; and the other mysteriously, in fear of water; after each had worked out his episode of love to discover that loss of love is as much "part of the fun" as the advent of love.

But how had this boy, this Pat O'Neill, earned the idea he exploited so brilliantly? Was it from what he had himself done? Or, as in Gareth's case, had failed to do?

For the first time, since sixteen years ago he had seen the profession of reader bathed in a glow of romance, Gareth began to muse on the personality

at the other end. . . . Who was he? What was he? Strange how these books drifted in from complete darkness.

Pat O'Neill. Young, certainly; for since in no passage did he dwell on the marvel of youth, he must obviously be in that one state when the marvel would not strike him. Young—and a genius—how well he would have taken his place as One of Them, if. . . . But that could never be, while Gareth was holding back the book till his own should be published, and render stale the other.

Sudden memory of Graham Carr, in unwonted confidential mood:

"I used to pace up and down outside here, before you decided on my fate. What a period that was of ghastly thrills, imagining all the accidents of fire and water which were destroying my precious manuscript. Yet, d'you know, if the ordeal of waiting had lasted a decade longer, I should never have screwed myself to the point of asking for a decision. One is possessed by the spirit of fatalism where one's first book is concerned. . . ."

Was that what it meant to Pat O'Neill? Was he even now chafing, in cramped circumstances, starved and shabby, fierily impatient of this delay to ambition? And if the delay were removed. . . . Gareth's imagination was imprinted with a very clear picture of something dark and eager and divinely insolent, seated high among "Campbell's Young Men" as their very latest and most successful acquisition. Nobody standing between him and his throne but Gareth . . . who suddenly felt

very weak and futile, pushing stubbornly against the vigorous onslaught of the unseen unknown personality at the other end.

"He shan't get in—with my idea; he shan't—!" Just because Pat O'Neill would have fitted there so marvellously; would, certainly, have looked down on the mere reader of other people's books.

"Can I see Mr. Campbell?"

"What name, please?" asked Gareth, standing up at his desk, and looking at the girl in the heavy dark green cloth, tailor-made, who had just entered through the swing-doors. He was alone in the office. Alexander was lunching an important client; and Guy Burnett was at Watford, interviewing the printers. Even Jimmy had just staggered off to the post, with an accumulation of rejected manuscripts.

"What name, please?"

"O'Neill."

. . . But Gareth had known it before she spoke. He had known at first sight of her, that the boy Pat O'Neill was a myth of his imagination. And that now and inevitably he was face to face with the consequences of a mean sin.

"Mr. Campbell is away."

She smiled . . . and the tilted curve of her lips, slow, mocking, hauntingly sad, broke with startling contrast across the conception of jolly roguish smile one might have been led to expect by her spirited poise, and wide-set happy green eyes, streaked and spotted with gold, and veiled by the defiant upward-curling lashes of dusky gold. She

was tall, as a goddess is tall ; and broad-shouldered; with supple hips ; and thick white skin that was powdered by a shower of tiny cowslip freckles round the bridge of her short blunt nose. Her hair, under its green leather slouch hat, was gold also, dull warm gold ; and sprang back squarely from her forehead, to be coiled again in a square frame round her cheeks and neck. A magnificent creature ; radiance and strength personified, even to the deep cleft in her chin . . . until she challenged her own strength by that smile, and scorned her radiance.

" That dear little lad who tried to stop me at the foot of the stairs also told me Mr. Campbell was away," she remarked thoughtfully. " You stick to it ? "

" Mr. Campbell *is* away."

Pat O'Neill regarded him steadily. Then with scornful deliberation crossed the room to the inner door marked Private, and flung it open.

The room beyond was empty of occupant. . . . She looked back at Gareth, recognized something gravely whimsical in his expression—and burst out laughing.

" I'm disappointed, Mr. Campbell. I frankly own it. I expected to expose you with fine dramatic effect—and all the while here you are quite tame, and ready to eat out of my hand."

He assured her patiently : " Mr. Campbell is away. On my word of honour I'm not he. You'll never find a publisher on view in the front office ; they're always strongly entrenched behind barricades of our unsold ' favourite novels ' in the

cellar. Would you care to go down and dig for him ? "

He had to talk nonsense to this girl ; even aware of her errand ; aware of the unspeakable wrong he had done her ; and of the lies he was bound in due course to utter under scrutiny of those straight gold-fringed eyes, still he had to talk to her in this wise. She exhilarated him past all sense. . . .

" Who are you, then ? Another partner ? "

" Mr. Alexander is the junior partner. He's out at present. That is to say, he's also down in the cellar. I'm reader to the firm. Is there anything I can do for you ? "

And he asked this . . . marvelling at his dispassionate insolence. If she knew—— !

" Yes. I sent up a novel, about six weeks ago. It was called " The Reverse of the Medal." Nothing to you, of course. Bores you to death. I'm not expecting any rampant animation on the subject. But, being mine, I have a fond fancy to know what's happening to it."

" You've heard nothing from us ? "

" A printed slip of acknowledgment, that's all."

Calmly Gareth verified her information from the volume in which the receipt of all manuscripts was noted down and dated.

" Yes, here we are . . . by Pat O'Neill . . . is that right ? "

" Quite. I'm Patricia really ; but I thought it sounded haughty."

" I prefer you as Patricia," he reflected.

" That's very dear and sweet of you, but—where's my book ? "

"It may have been mislaid; I'll make due enquiries; and we will let you know our decision as soon as possible."

Patricia O'Neill pondered on this for a moment. Then shook her head. "Not good enough. If I went to the boarding-school where I had placed my wee childie—be not amazed; this is pure hypothesis!—and they said: 'She—or he—may have been mislaid,' I wouldn't say: 'Thank you very much,' and go home to my tea; dear me, no; not a bit of it!"

"Does the book mean as much to you as a child?" He had to torment himself with these questions. . . . And quite irrelevantly, he wondered how old she was; she looked about twenty-three.

"Well, just at present it's rather in the middle of my world, and—— Hang your questions!" she flared at him, in sudden hot indignation; "are they going to accept it or not? You *must* know—and I *will* know."

He sharpened a pencil to a very minute point, before, carefully non-committal, he informed her: "I think I can promise you a decision in a week from to-day."

"Come now, that's very pleasing—almost human,"—with one of her mournful tantalizing smiles she apologized for her recent outburst. "I'll reward you by going at once, so that those two poor harassed fellows skulking below can come up and have their tea in peace."

Gareth badly wanted to ask her to come out and have tea with him; but some hidden impulse for-

bade any such proceeding until he should have remedied the injury of her book held back.

"Good afternoon, Miss O'Neill." And before he had fully grasped to what fantastic extremes of behaviour the wild stimulation of her visit had brought him, he heard himself ask, as he held open the door: "How old are you?"

She halted, unastonished; and leant against the portal, hands clasped behind her back.

"Is this official enquiry? Shall I have to tell my age to the seven-and-seventy publishers who refuse the book? Because it might get about that way."

"Please forgive me. I—I can't think what came over me for the moment," painfully abashed.

"My dear man, I love your healthy young interest. I'm twenty-two-and-a-half. How old are you? Let's be frankly curious, by all means. What's your name. How many glass marbles have you got to play with?"

"My name is Gareth Temple. I'm forty-and-a-half. And I have one glass marble to play with. . . . At least, I had. But it's smashed."

"Recently?"

"Very recently."

"Something is amusing you; what is it?"

"Nothing. . . ."

"You were right to shut all your dreams into one glass marble, Mr. Temple."

"It's the way of a fool, Miss O'Neill."

"No, it's the way of a wise man, who realizes that the big marble smashed is worth more to him than all the little ones still rolling about the floor."

"If he has deliberately shut all his dreams into the one marble, and is aware that the loss of it is as much his gain as the gain of it—then yes. But not if he is simply a blind weakling who can't help loving the one marble—clutches it so tightly that he smashes it—and resents furiously the escape of his dreams. . . ."

"The marble would need to be of very brittle glass——" She regarded him quizzically: "These metaphorical metaphysics are miles beyond me, you know! Besides which, it happens to be the theme of my book—or rather, its antithesis, which you have been so merrily expounding. Out with the truth, Mr. Temple—you've read it after all."

His features stiffened to immobility. "Ah, yes, your book; I will make enquiries at once. The delay is quite unforgivable. Good afternoon, Miss O'Neill."

"Good afternoon, Mr. Temple."

Gareth, shutting the door on the lazy mischievous banter of her voice, felt as though since half an hour he had been walking on thick resilient turf. He sat dreaming at his desk . . . dreaming of the girl Patricia . . . spinning webs of words over her personality, with the ease and busyness of the diligent spider. . . .

Patricia! . . . Oh, the flush and stir of romance in her; not romance faintly suggested, but expression of the thing itself, incarnate and unconscious, in the splendour of her build, her long loose limbs and negligent bearing; in the clean backward spring of her hair, and in that haunting

amazing smile, and in her careless quip of speech . . . inexhaustible romance !

. . . The wraith of a girl who was pale and frail and slender, with eyes that were blue hyacinths drenched in rain ; a girl whose thoughts were like silent places, and whose touch was as cool as the sand in a cave, hovered forlornly on the dim borderlands of nowhere-at-all, whither she had been rudely expelled by the intruder. Her look was a reproachful reminder to Gareth—" I was your dream." . . .

Pat O'Neill ! How she had made the empty flat spaces throb with her presence. And she was a genius ; had written that book—tumbled it forth out of sheer vitality of brain. . . . He was glad he had said : " I prefer Patricia "—it had given him the chance to speak her name aloud. She was a genius—at twenty-two. . . . Oh Heavens, twenty-two ! And he almost double that age, with not a single achievement he could produce to show to her—except, of course (with a pang of relief) his book. . . .

His book. He had forgotten.

For an instant the old hatred was stirred, of the author who had anticipated him in his idea. . . . Surely, surely, Pat O'Neill might have hit on something else ; might so easily have hit on something else. And thus they could each have published a masterpiece, and have met proudly on equal ground. . . . What a hypocritical cur he felt himself now, having lied to the girl Patricia. . . .

His book. . . . "Ah well, the one is bound to knock out the other; and she was first in——"

When he got home that evening, the reader sat down and wrote for Leslie Campbell an enthusiastic report in praise of "The Reverse of the Medal." Then he took the manuscript from the bottom drawer of the desk, and tied it up in a parcel, preparatory to taking it the following morning to the office.

"And with that, my friend," bestowing a little twisted smile on the black china cat, "with that, goes any hope we may have had of being ourselves One of Them."

"Couldn't pull it through, eh?" jeered the cat.

CHAPTER II

PATRICIA O'NEILL had grown up a victim to the excitement of big ideas. Thus she lived her life on something of an heroic scale. She could go through anything that was disagreeable to her, once she had fitted an "idea" to it; an idea that allowed of translation into tangible action, that is; she had no use for the abstract theory which dwelt aloof from its owner, and which could be kept comfortably enshrined in a crystal or high on an inaccessible shelf. But there was a tingling curiosity in seeing how existence worked out, adapted afresh to each big idea applied. Patricia discovered joyously that there were few thoughts or desires, brain-conceived, that could not immediately be put into execution—provided, of course, that one were willing to accept the consequent damage. And here, she stood by a certain immortal discovery she had made when, as a child, she had been afflicted with toothache: "I can always pretend it's out and on the mantelpiece and aching over there without me; and when Mr. Wright tugs, I never *quite* guess beforehand just how much it's going to hurt; so that it's all fun—even if it's hateful fun. . . ."

So she raced through the years in a fashion calculated to cause much anxiety to an adoring

family not aware of the true inner significance that would provide a clue to most of her inexplicable doings. "Pat's terribly inconsistent," said Ann, her one step-sister. "Pat's an egoist," pronounced Hetty, the other step-sister. And: "I wish Patricia were more conventional!" sighed Mrs. O'Neill. But if these accusations were just—if Pat did leap from idea to idea, she was always splendidly consistent to the one temporarily enthroned; only she was wise enough to lay herself open to Ann's accusation rather than cling to an idea that had lost its elasticity, that had gone slack to the pull. And if she were indeed unconventional, it was from no motive of cussedness or desire to shock, but merely that in the tearing progress of whatsoever wagon she drove, star-hitched, athwart space and along the rim of the skies, she would not stay for the impediments that little people had lain along their little pavements, to hinder the swift.

As for the charge of egoism—

"I look at it in this way, Shrimpet,"—her nickname for Hetty; cross between a shrimp and a limpet!—"Persons like you and Ann, who can contrive to be more rampantly interested in other people than in yourselves, are a sorrowful sight. You have only your own mind, such as it is, Shrimpet, for thinking purposes; the mind of Mrs. Tomkyns round the corner is of no earthly consequence to you when you are alone to face the problem of seven times eight. Granted? You have likewise only your own soul, Shrimpet, for great sensations. Therefore t argues to me an

ungrateful disposition, a lack of proper balance, and a want of respect to your own mind and soul, to depreciate them out of existence when it's a question of the mind and soul of Mrs. Tomkyns. Besides all that, if Mrs. Tomkyns happens to be a reasonable creature who puts herself first, and you are putting her first—and getting praised for an unselfish disposition—then there are two people putting Mrs. Tomkyns first, and nobody at all putting Shrimpet O'Neill first. Which makes the world lopsided. Oh, altruism is well beyond me, I admit it. So throw me over the caramels."

After an interval of silence, during which Patricia cheerfully removed the paper from each one of the sweets, to find the especial kind she coveted, and Hetty watched her in speculative apprehension, Ann, who had been thinking over her elder sister's speech, questioned slowly :

"Yes, but might not Mrs. Tomkyns be putting Hetty first ? A sort of cross-over putting first ? "

"It's rash to bet on it. But I've not the least objection to Shrimpet taking existence in the gambling spirit, if she chooses. Only let us understand that it *is* the gambling spirit, and not the sheer beauty of sacrifice, that's all. How much did you pay for these ? They're rotten ! "

"It's noble to sacrifice," pronounced Hetty, well on her way to becoming a prig.

"Dearest Shrimpet, unselfish people can know nothing about that. They sacrifice as a matter of course ; it's a pleasure to them, I assure you. It's only an egoist like me who can speak feelingly of the rich agonies of sacrifice. . . . Do you like

the ones with bits of nut in them, Shrimpet? Hm—that's a pity; so do I! . . . And that's why I'm pained and grieved beyond measure when anyone calls me selfish; because each time I do wrench myself, creaking and protesting, to an act of sacrifice, I make a mental register of that stupendous fact, its date and circumstance—— Here's a nut one—catch!—no—it's quite all right—I've provided for myself! . . . Well, naturally, memory becomes crowded in time with these bulging obsessions of one's own acts of unselfishness—twice a year, or thereabouts, mounts up, let me tell you, in nineteen years. So that, contemplating these, I do view myself, truly and honestly, as more unselfish than you—you, with memory blankly unretentive of your effortless days of sunbeam-scatter. What causes me to mourn bitterly—I repeat it, bitterly—is the disproportionate appreciation I receive from you all after my twice-yearly. I mention it as we happen to be on the subject, that's all. Believe me, Shrimpet, bravery is to be found only in the coward, not in the brave man. And true unselfishness can come only from the true egoist. Usually it doesn't."

Hetty looked at Ann, who was quietly smiling; then back again at Patricia.

"Wouldn't you—I mean, don't you like giving up little things for people you rather love?" she ventured.

"Heaven forbid! When I am finally guilty, O Shrimpet, of offering up my all in a very ecstasy of selfishness, it shall be to the one person—not to people, but to the one person—who is big enough

to warrant the wickedness of self-obliteration. But to please myself in the untidy fashion peculiar to you and Ann, all day long and day after day complacently giving up things in driblets to people who don't count—me, for instance !—that is self-indulgence carried to a degree which I really cannot condone ! "

After which severe and lofty denunciation, Patricia absorbed the last of the caramels ; sprang down from her perch on the schoolroom desk ; and casually asked Hetty to do an errand for her at the far end of the town, through a mile and a half of driving rain. Not seeing the twinkle concealed by Patricia's veiling lashes, Hetty indignantly refused ; remarking, as the other had intended she should : " I'd have gone for you with pleasure if you hadn't said all that just now. . . ."

Hetty was the youngest of the trio ; only fourteen ; and the sole offspring of a late marriage between Shane O'Neill and Mary Lynton, widower and widow, with a daughter apiece to bring along as contribution to the new household. Patricia was four at the time ; and staid little Ann Lynton two and three quarters. Dr. O'Neill died a few years later, leaving his wife and the three girls a roomy comfortable house with a large garden in Sydenham, where his practice had been ; and a very adequate income for their needs.

When Patricia was twenty, she met Dacres Upton.

She met him while on a winter holiday in Switzerland, at Les Avants. He beat her in the Mixed Singles Toboggan Race. And then refused

to give up the prize to her, when a sociable and tactless sports' secretary suggested it were not unbecoming on his part to do so.

"What do you suppose she'd do with a prize she hadn't won?" enquired Upton.

"It was a very close finish. Miss O'Neill put up a magnificent fight."

"She did," the young man assented unemotionally.

"Well then," with a genial beam, "we agree that chivalry dictates——"

"That I shouldn't insult the girl by treating her either as a babe or an idiot. Certainly we agree. Besides," thoughtfully, "I happen to want those binoculars. . . ."

A report of this conversation was carried to Patricia by her indignant admirer, the secretary. At the fancy-dress ball held at the hotel that evening, she had an opportunity of warmly thanking Upton for retaining the binoculars.

He said slowly, in the level tones that never altered: "Of course Mixed Races run on chivalrous lines become an absurdity. But Fennimore doesn't know that it's as much fun to lose as to win. He'd say it was, because that's the 'British sporting spirit.' . . . You hear about it at election-times. But he would never realize the truth of it."

The girl's interest was spurred by this. Though she only said mournfully: "They are very nice binoculars. I have never had any binoculars of my own. . . ."

Upton promised her she should occasionally

look through his. And she asked him if he were not by this concession hopelessly damaging his reputation for inflexibility. He smiled; and offered to race her again, for their private satisfaction, down the same course and under the same conditions.

"And shall I get the binoculars, if I win?"

"No; those are beyond your attainment, now. But you'll get the pleasure of feeling that you are equally capable of the performance that won them for me."

"My dear good man, I shan't be able to bear such a stupendous emotion, all at once, without any training. . . ."

"Quarter to three, at the foot of the Loup." And Dacres Upton relinquished her to another partner, from whom she gathered information that Upton was a Captain in the Army, and recently home from India. Her interest was spurred anew; he did not give an impression of the accepted military type.

He was victor again, in their private contest the following afternoon. And Patricia, who had been secretly nourishing a faint hope that he would after all yield the honour to her, and do this with such skilful cunning that she might not even suspect it—Patricia was both surprised and pained . . . and extremely respectful.

They paired off together as much as they could, during his remaining fortnight at Les Avants. But Upton was with a large party of uncles and cousins; and Patricia could not often desert her mother and Ann and Hetty, who regarded her as indispensable

to their enjoyment. So that their mutual appetites for the other's sole society was keenly whetted by frustration. And once, during a lively and convivial excursion, Dacres remarked to Patricia, in strictly matter-of-fact tones :

" To Hell with all these braying barbarians. Next Christmas we're coming here alone for a week. Don't forget—December the twenty-third, Charing Cross, in time for the boat-train."

His voice blended quite naturally with the general conversation in progress ; and nobody overheard.

" Shall we see that Upton man in London, Pat ? " enquired Hetty, on the eve of departure.

" I expect so. He told me his regiment was recalled for a good long bout of home service."

" I don't like him."

" Alack, Shrimpet ! and I love him passionately."

Six weeks later, and Patricia would have suppressed that remark for the very truth of it. . . .

Almost directly on their return, Patricia was informed that a gentleman was waiting to see her in her own sitting-room—as the eldest of the girls, Mrs. O'Neill considered her entitled to this luxury—and found Dacres leaning up against the fireplace.

" You're a dangerous creature," he informed her gently, without further greeting.

Patricia modestly cast down her eyes. " You flatter me."

" Dangerous to me. I saw that from the beginning. I ought to have kept out of your way—but that's a futile fashion of avoiding the whole affair. . . . I'd have gone on thinking about you, and

tormenting myself; wondering just how much difference you would have made if only I'd let you. . . . In fact, I'd probably have overestimated your effect on my life."

"I think not . . ." murmured Patricia.

"Well—may I smoke? Thanks!—I prefer to go on with anything I'm afraid of—on with it, and through with it, and done with it. So—here I am."

Patricia lit a cigarette; and reposing face downwards on the peacock cushions of the divan, propped her chin on her hands, and gazed thoughtfully into the ascending spirals of smoke. . . .

"What is impressing me so profoundly that I can hardly bear to mention it without tears, is your tender regard for my attitude in all this. I'm touched by it, really I am. A poor girl in my station of life isn't used to such consideration."

He looked down at her, smiling.

"You're rather a darling . . . Pat."

And she knew that behind all his flow of equable talk, lurked some element of the stuff that was going to make this worth while. Very much worth while. . . .

"Just for ten minutes," Dacres proposed, after a pause, "I want you to imagine that I'm my own closest pal, who has known me all my life, and has come to have a little private talk with you to warn you against me. He's probably in love with you too—this pal of mine."

"Simply pestered with admirers!" Patricia informed the slow-curling blue vapours that twisted fantastically between her and the man. But she

was tumultuously glad that he had actually and as a matter of course spoken the phrase. . . .
"Go on."

"Between ourselves, Miss O'Neill, Upton is not to be trusted."

"Fancy! And I thought him such a harmless well-spoken young fellow."

"Not so very young; over thirty. He'll try and make you trust in his sincerity, and in certain of his moods he's rather plausible. But don't. Stick like grim death to the notion that he only needs white spats and a dyed moustache to make him the complete villain of popular melodrama. Remember that—and you'll be all right. His inner nature is villainous. Believe me, my dear Miss O'Neill, I'm speaking as much for Dacres' good as for yours."

"Oh, I believe you, my man. I had a sort of inkling that Dacres' good came somewhere into this merry little pastime of yours."

Very seriously Upton looked down into the mocking lure of her eyes: "I'm not sure that it is a pastime. Pat, I warn you—I can't do more—that I'm not to be trusted."

"I hate to boast," retorted the girl, "but neither am I!"

He laughed. And took her in his arms. . . .

They continued for some time on these terms, Dacres forcing Patricia into belief that his intentions were strictly dishonourable; and she countering with the assumption that she was a rank egoist, and was toying with his affections, preparatory at

any moment to jilt him in the fashion of the cruellest wanton. Dacres, however, declared on one occasion that it was mere perverted vanity which had caused them to assume such lurid aspects :

" We're quite respectable domestic characters, really. . . . Come with me to the Censor, Pat, and let me ask him for your hand in marriage. If he sees through your blatant vampire act, and passes you as fit for publication, you'll never be able to impress me again."

" I've heard of those marriages ; they're performed under bribery by some wretched hireling who isn't really in holy orders. A pal of yours warned me of just such an attempt to ensnare my girlish confidence."

" Vampires have no girlish confidence. And that pal of mine is a meddlesome and treacherous old bore. . . ."

But he would never let her continue long in any settled faith of his purpose. There was menace to their intercourse—menace which she braved again and again, recklessly, always to find herself saved it would seem by some slender accident . . . or was this queer man deliberately playing the guardian angel to her, as well as the silent threatener of evil ? Jekyll pitted against Hyde, and Hyde conscious of his Jekyll. . . . Dacres Upton not yet sure on which side he was ranged himself. And she, for her part, wanted to prove to him once and for all how she joyed in this scrambling slippery contest of their wills ; how, challenging all his disguises, she trusted him ; would persist in trust-

ing him to the furthest extremes of peril; expose herself to hurt in all vulnerable places—thus forfeiting all right to cry out if her daring were punished. In this spirit would she consent to that breathless week in Switzerland, which they had so often anticipated. And afterwards perhaps, if he still desired it. . . . He was quartered now with his company at Aldershot; in January his period of home service would be up, and he might be sent abroad at any moment; to Egypt, perhaps. Well—if he still fervently desired it, she might go with him . . . his wife. Patricia was twenty, and unwilling to yield up her adventurous girlhood—but Dacres Upton was the mate for her. She would risk her all with him first, for the fun of the risk, and for her own youth's sake. . . . In spite of her brilliant imagination, she was still funnily possessed of the utterly childish notion that adventure closes perforce with the sound of wedding-bells.

Under his almost obtrusive impassivity of outward bearing, she had discovered a fund of mischief fully rivalling her own; his audacities gained an added spice from the level well-bred tones which he never varied. As for his appearance—Patricia once informed him that he was the Least Common Multiple of every ordinary man that had ever existed: average height; tanned hatchet face; nondescript grey-blue eyes; fawn hair, sleekly brushed backwards. . . . "I've seen thousands of you, Dacres!"

"It's the Army mould; and originally set up as a protest to the splendid Guardsman of the Vic-

torian era, with flowing chestnut beard and eyes as velvety as a woman's glove and steely withal as the iron hand inside it. . . ."

"Why did you enter the Army?" She had often speculated on this anomaly.

"I was afraid of death."

Patricia questioned no further. Half a year of the man's companionship had taught her that he was no coward by temperament; quite obviously a moral and physical stoic where life was concerned; fearless, too, of all the circumstances of death—suffering, hardship, loss, peril, sudden attack. It must therefore be the actual wrenching apart of flesh and spirit which caused him that sick dread apparent in the one brief phrase just spoken; or perhaps recoil from the after stillness and decay. It was like him, therefore, voluntarily to adopt the profession of arms. Silently she applauded the self-intolerant discipline of his choice.

The months gyrated dizzily, with song-sound as of the humming of many tops. . . . Autumn now—Patricia's favourite season. Red October affected her as April affects most natures; exhilarated her body; crammed her soul with restless flying hopes. . . . The hours she snatched alone with Dacres were too frequent for longing to crust itself with peace; insufficient for a generous passion waxing to its zenith. More and ever more their talk recurred to that truant week at the end of December; week which was to contain two days' wakeful journey at the start and at the finish of it, like white sentinels guarding the three central

days, shutting them off to the aloofness of enchantment.

On the fifth of December Patricia received from Dacres the following letter, which she read at the family breakfast-table :

" I've met the woman who means all life to me, and death, and beyond death. I've no excuses to make for myself, Patricia—except that I warned you that I was not to be trusted. Did you take in the warning ?—I hope so.

" Thank you for the gift of a good time. I can never ask for a better comrade than you have been. Nor do I suppose I will ever admire anyone quite as much as I admire you, now and always.

" Of course our arrangement for December 23rd holds, unless you wish to cancel it. Personally, I'm looking forward immensely to our week of winter-sport. " DACRES."

" . . . Coffee, please, Ann." Gently Patricia laid the letter back in its envelope. She would reread it presently, when she was alone ; and strive to fathom his motive for this silly gratuitous lie.

A second perusal, when she was lying on the divan of her own sitting-room, convinced her reason beyond all doubt that he wrote the truth. Behind reason, every nerve and sense and feeling quivered their protest, clamoured in startled incredulity. . . . " Why—he loved you ! he *loved* you ! . . ."

Hm . . . love ! Strange to think that he had been right in his grave self-indictment ; right in his warning to her. He was what the world would

term a "rotter"; what she herself, one day, would dismiss with scornful appellation of "the wrong sort of man." . . . Meanwhile, there was a thick dark fog to be traversed between "one day" and the present hour . . . she could see how black, but she could not tell yet how long. Beyond the fog, the clear road again, and sunshine, and freedom, and the day-long tramp, light-hearted and light of heel. . . .

Patricia sprang impatiently from the couch; crossed to the window; stood looking out across the fantastic patchwork of roofs spread below her. . . .

She must think this out while yet stunned to all anguish . . . presently would come tears, and groping misery; futile rebellion; futile attempts at alleviation. . . . And logic would be drenched and helpless.

Think it out. . . . "I've met the woman who means all life to me, and all death, and——" That did not need much thinking out, at least. It was kind of Dacres to be so lucid.

. . . Patricia found herself wondering if the blow would have fallen with yet more fatal effect on her if it had occurred after their wild stolen week? She had not had the remotest conception of the terms on which the adventure was undertaken; had left it to Dacres—or to the inspiration of the moment. There had been a tingle in this haphazard prospect which had woken her at dawn with flushed cheeks, and fast-beating heart, and a gladness in her own daring that was part tremulous, part triumphant. Neither was she in the

least aware if the man had made up his mind to any settled course of virtue or villainy—or whether he too were letting the moment decide. . . .

Well—now she would never know. Maybe it was as well that chance had not allowed her the full reaping of happiness for its fuller aftermath of grief. Or might grief have been more tranquil in grateful recognition of the harvest gathered in before the rain ?

" It doesn't matter. . . ."

Dacres' offer of " our week of winter-sport," as though indeed nothing had happened to mar its fulfilment, goaded her to a fine flare of anger ; she tore the letter violently across and across. . . . Then paused, half amused that she should have been betrayed into any such act of commonplace melodrama. . . . But how dared he suggest so coolly the spoiling of all that the past had given them, by this dead travesty of their exultant scheme ? A smile twisted her sweet mocking mouth, as from infallible perception of the workings of his brain she followed out his mental evolutions which had resulted in the proposal. . . .

Thus Dacres : " The man of the first degree would not have invited her, under the circumstances, from sheer indifference. The man of the second degree would not have invited her, nor even mentioned the plan fallen through, from motives of delicacy, from the fear to hurt her. The man of the third degree would elaborately have invited her to come after all and in spite of all ; throughout the week insulting her by an extra show of chivalry, gentleness and charming consideration. And the

man of the fourth degree, which is myself, pay her the compliment of supposing she would prefer to play up, as though indeed nothing had happened, to the hard good-fellowship and careless exacting brutality which would have been her lot by divine right, a month ago. . . ."

"And the man of the fifth degree, Dacres," whispered Patricia, to the torn fragments of his letter littering the floor, "would not have committed the blunder of asking me to believe in all that careful balderdash. . . . The superman of the fifth degree would have behaved exactly like the man of the first degree—and would have let well alone. You're not quite up to that, are you, Dacres?" . . .

Funny—to have been jilted! Like being unseated when in full gallop. When would she ride again?—They say one ought to mount at once after a throw, or the nerve is gone. . . .

Some of the numbness was passing away now.... Hurriedly she envisioned the sort of things that were bound to beset her while she beat her way through her bad time . . . sodden and bewildered with tears; storms of gusty feeling leading to nowhere; leaden indifference to the stir and pulse of life around her;—then blindly stupid contemptible moods,when she would not, *could* not face her loss. . . . it was all a mistake—the explanation might come at any moment—Dacres might come at any moment . . . moods of attempted evasion, cramming out thought by some frenzied occupation, wilfully wrenching her mind from contemplation of the truth . . . other people—other men—any-

thing . . . artificially stuffing her ears, her sight, her logic; deliberately avoiding certain places; stumbling painfully over certain dates; alternation of sentimental memories with bombastic "don't care!" . . . More tears. . . .

All this, serving only to prolong the agony. All this . . . *mess!* . . . How she despised the sort of thing that a love-disappointment made out of its victim!

Was there then no cleaner way out of it all? No short cut through the fog? Patricia vowed that not Dacres nor any man was to be allowed to weight her buoyancy, bedraggle her white pride. Not for long, anyway. Already she was eager to regain her forfeited fleetness. Was there no short cut?—quick—now—while still she could think?—

And then, in the nick of time, Patricia was whirled up by one of her big ideas!

Suppose, literally, she were to face the matter out, instead of literally fleeing from it—— (She had heard of girls, in such straits, who had immediately been dispatched on a lengthy sea-voyage.) . . . Suppose she were to consent to the week at Les Avants; consent of her own free will to be confronted by the daily hourly evidence of her loss: the perpetual presence of Dacres—loving someone else; renewal of the most intimate companionship, lacking that glow which lit it from behind as through a transparency. No possibility then, after that, of pitiful self-delusion that it was all a mistake, or that he would come back.

It would convince her. And, convincing her, set her free.

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But it would irrevocably kill all the good they had enjoyed together. This hollow repetition of what had been once a ringing beautiful thing—it would blur and sully memory ; forbid it altogether. Was it not a shame . . . to kill a beautiful thing ?

No . . . and so much the better ! To kill the past in order to clear the future. All the love he had given her, overlain by torment, stung and poisoned. With this one week as a thorn-barrier between her and the year gone by, she would never be able to linger for regretful sentiment. The horizon ahead was hers, at the expense of the backward look.

Only—could she go through with it ? Go through with it, and not break down ? Seven days of strain, incessant and unflinching. . . . Well, she would at least have her nights alone, if she wanted to . . . cry.

Slowly the episode began to take on the hues of adventure ; harsh sombre hues—but why need adventure of necessity be joyous ? This sharp test to come was surely as much part of her adventure with Dacres as his arms gripping her and his mouth hard upon her eyelids. . . .

Yes—yes—with a queer sense of being lifted high, higher, out of the ruts of thought, Patricia had a glimpse of adventure, true, and sonorous, and made complete by anguish to the verge of breaking-point. It was adventure itself, this dash into the fire for her liberty beyond. . . .

The vision died down . . . left her tired, and a little dazed. But she wrote to Upton at once, saying that she would come to Les Avants, as they

had planned it. She did not comment on the rest of his letter ; and she left her motive for the acceptance unexplained. He might assume, if he pleased, that she could not suffer total loss of him, preferred his company even under the stated conditions ; or else he might suppose it was for the sake of the winter-sports——

No—Dacres was not quite fool enough for that.

As a matter of fact, she had not made allowances for his present thickened perceptions where she was concerned. All his fine keen understandings were employed upon his new love, her moods and ways and exactions. He accepted Patricia's decision in an unquestioning spirit ; they had agreed upon this week ; it was her due to insist upon it. He could trust her to play up to their unspoken treaty of " no scenes."

He hated spending his seven days of Christmas leave apart from—her. But he owed them to Pat. His strict sense of honour insisted that he owed them to Pat. He could not refrain from wishing, however, that Pat had been woman enough to answer his proposal with an indignant or hysterical avowal that she never wanted to see him again.

He was due back at Aldershot on the morning of the thirty-first. . . . Perhaps he might just manage to wind up his holiday by an hour with the beloved, on the night of the thirtieth, after he had parted from Pat. One hour—it would be worth the whole strenuous wearisome week preceding it. No matter how fagged he was—somehow it should be managed. So he made his plans. And it was with eyes fixed steadily upon the climax he had

promised himself, that he met Patricia at Folkestone among the crowd that pressed on to the gangway to the Boulogne boat. . . . It was with gaze that had never wavered from that climax, that he bade her good-bye at Charing Cross Station, exactly a week later, at twenty-five minutes past nine on the evening of the thirtieth. His casual farewell was just what it would have been had the days behind them been packed rooms of treasure. Only she would have received a look that denied the careless utterance . . . silent assurance of a letter the next morning.

Altogether, Upton's magnificent lack of consideration for her welfare had materially and quite unnecessarily added to the torment of Patricia's self-chosen week of discipline. It was a manner of complimenting her which had required considerable living-up-to in the old days when one was happy and could live up to well-nigh anything: Never to betray discomfort nor emotion—that was all very well, spurred by his approbation. But with his dreamy indifference taking for granted the excellence of her conduct, Patricia could have wished for a little less fatigue duty. She could account for his absent-mindedness easily enough . . . then the sudden pull back to recollection . . . involuntary atonement rendered by some extra deferential courtesy towards herself, hastily superseded by the brusquer comradeship of the man of the fourth degree. Fully a dozen times on the outward journey Patricia watched him through this little comedy—"Truly man is an amazing work of God!"—mouth tilted

to its own slow mocking smile . . . but now her eyes were dead ; dead green, that had once held their hot gold sparkle. She was tired even before they started ; for lying to one's family is another thing that requires to be buoyed up by the subconsciousness of great delights in store to render the lies worth while. Patricia had not at all enjoyed the invention of a school friend who had invited her to Scotland for a week ; so many tiny props went to make this structure dependable ; she loathed herself for the smaller quibbles far more than for the one big lie. Hetty, of course, asked dozens of questions ; and Anne asked none at all, but insisted on packing for her—which was worse. . . . " Will you really need your skates in Scotland, Pat ? " And all the secret arrangements would have been such fun if . . . And the journey itself would have been such fun if. . . .

Mrs. O'Neill had just been peremptorily ordered by her doctor into a nursing-home for six weeks ; her health required perfect rest. It was a relief to Pat that no news of her escapade could possibly penetrate in any form of idle gossip, to the person whom it would most grieve.

Patricia was only twenty-two, and notoriously heedless of public opinion, or it might have struck her forcibly that to risk her good name for the love of a man was a foolish and headstrong proceeding ; but that to risk her good name for the sake of an idea was more than folly—and approached divine lunacy. . . .

Seven days that were like patterns clearly pricked out by a red-hot needle. She did not

suppose she would ever forget a single moment of them. Two days out and two days back. And three days that were outwardly a dazzle of ice and snow and sunshine, and white peaks scissor-cut into dark blue skies ; and warning shouts of the bob-sleighers as they shot round the curve of the Loup—Gare ! Gare !! Gare !!! . . . clean crunch of the steel runners through the hard glittering path of snow ; skaters swooping in fantastic postures to and fro on the circular ice-rink ; hotels that were mere glorified wooden châlets ; shining yellow parquet of floors and corridors littered by skis and luges waiting to be scraped ; in all the rooms the smell of soaked woollens drying on the *calorifère* ; young voices clattering ceaselessly their excited sports-jargon. . . . Three breathless nights of carnival and dancing, dancing till the stiffened limbs relaxed to suppleness ; dancing till four in the morning ; up again at eight ; no respite—Patricia gave thanks to her superb health and fitness that carried her with credit through at least the physical wear and tear of her . . . holiday. Carried her through, laughing.

But there were moments whose setting and opportunity craved their fill of passion, that perforce remained empty as beautiful scooped-out cups—too beautiful to be robbed of their meed of glowing wine. . . .

One evening, after sunset, Dacres and Patricia raced on their low-built skeletons down the lonely white mountain-path, that was now rose-flooded to an unearthly radiance. Their old course, on which he had twice beaten her. This time she beat

him. . . . and sprang erect on the snow-bank, dragging away her luge just quickly enough to avert a spill as he came whizzing in her wake. For a second, in exultant anticipation of his applause, she had forgotten. . . . His hearty "Well done, Pat!" sounded almost real.

"I say, what a run!" She was flushed and tingling from her success, and the speed, and the keen whip of the air.

"I beat you twice, though. I'm not sure that you deserve the binoculars yet. And you won't get another chance, as we go home to-morrow."

Her mood died at the sudden animation betrayed in his last phrase.—Curse the man . . . couldn't he behave with outward decency, anyhow? Listlessly she picked up her luge, shook the snow from her shoulders. . . .

She rather thought she deserved more than the binoculars.

But he seemed as impervious to memories as though his faculties were encased in something hard and slippery, from which all flung allusions rebounded ineffectually. And in an hour's time he would be holding her in his arms for the one-step; and his hands would be entirely nerveless; and his dancing automatically perfect. . . .

As Upton had stopped alone down in the valley on the night of their arrival, and had only followed her up to Les Avants the following morning, the other visitors at the hotel, and the staff, and the native peasantry, believed the two to have met accidentally, for the second time; and to be renewing an acquaintance that was rapidly approaching

the interesting stage of a formal engagement. Therefore, and as though fate were bent on atoning for its last year's unkindness in the matter, everybody combined to manœuvre that they should invariably be thrown together, and left to themselves. It did not lighten the burden of intercourse, but it added to the situation—at least from Pat's point of view—a certain pungent element of humour. Their combined prowess at all forms of winter-sport had not been forgotten; and they walked isolated and conspicuous: the daring pair who skated so beautifully together, danced so harmoniously together, were so closely matched at ski-ing and luging: "I really forget how many prizes they carried off between them last year. . . ."

Last year. Oh, no danger but that she would hate him enough, when the reaction would set in from this ghastly necessity of playing-up and playing-up; when she would have time to recall and to hate. Safely and surely he was murdering the old Dacres whom she had loved; with every act and look; especially with every act and look left undone. . . . Thus and thus he was loosening her bondage, as she had intended he should. She was glad she had come, and a thousand times been persuaded of the utter change in him; in a thousand exquisite ways had his indifference pounded into her receptivity. Glad that she was not sitting at home . . . a hot fire—a little room—a muffled obstinate sorrow.

Only . . . they had planned such a wonderful week!

She checked the rush of thought. Not for that

had she come adventuring on the wrong side of the sun ; not to give way at the last to a sluggish sentimentalism her soul spurned. Not for that had she wilfully spoilt the fairest message time had as yet whispered ; not that she should now hang back to regret its damaged fairness. . . .

For Patricia O'Neill was proud of her twenty-one years, and the glorious vigour of her limbs, and the resilient stretch of her brain ; and of her power to shape her life obedient to those empyreal flashes of inspiration that burst upon her out of the angry clouds. Too proud to yield up one jot of longing to a man who was oblivious of her. She had heard and read of the divinity of sacrifice, of pride venting itself in profoundest humility—but at twenty-two this creed was too meek and too quenched of colour for her acceptance. And not all the indignity of Dacres' far-away gaze into the black dripping glooms, as the train pounded its way from Folkestone to Charing Cross, could render her less proud. She braced her overtaxed nerves to meet the last demands upon them . . . for she knew well enough whither Upton was bound that night—that night still—after he had got rid of her. His adventure did not end simultaneously with hers. . . .

The same cynical destiny as had attended them all along, had provided they should be alone in their first-class carriage. If their truancy had fulfilled the promise of its first conception, then in what grateful mood would they now be giving thanks for their isolation . . . isolation that permitted her to lie along one of the seats, her head

drawn down to his shoulder; his hard sinewy hands straying very softly indeed over her hair and her cheeks and her throat . . . lulled tender mood of retrospect . . . naughty children returning home, too tired, too happy to care if punishment await them. . . .

"Kiss me, Patricia—we're almost there. I can see the lights. It's been a good time. . . . Kiss me, Patricia—dear. . . ."

Had he really said it? Or had she been dozing? She started to an upright position in her corner; her head had lain against the window-blind. And Dacres had not moved from his seat at the far end of the carriage. He was still looking steadily out of the window, and he was faintly smiling . . . boat and train had been punctual; and already he saw the blurred points of light that betokened London. . . .

He had told her he would be with her on the evening of December the thirtieth, at a quarter to ten. He would be true to his word.

CHAPTER III

"ABOUT that book you sent us up a few days ago, Temple—let me see—'The Reverse of the Medal,' wasn't it?"

"Yes, Mr. Alexander."

"You thought very highly of it?"

"Very highly indeed," replied Gareth.

"It's really not at all a bad piece of work"; the junior partner was almost enthusiastic.

"Have you come to any decision on it?" Gareth enquired, with feigned nonchalance. It was a week to-morrow that his promise to Pat O'Neill fell due.

"Impossible while Mr. Campbell is still away. I've just heard from him that he intends stopping in Scotland over the New Year. But I fancy he will agree with me that it's worth while to prevent this author from entering into a contract with Locker and Swyn; he's very much their style."

For Alexander did not regard the firm of Leslie Campbell with the eye of its proud founder, as a definite and individual establishment; but as a negative result of what had to be positively prevented from straying to any rival firm of publishers.

"The characterization is fairly strong, and the

central idea passably original," continued the unemotional young Oxonian.

And again the reader assented.

"Well, this O'Neill—whoever he may be—" referring to the manuscript again, "must wait another fortnight. He'll have to alter the title; I'm not keen on it, and it's bad for the ads. I daresay we can get it out by April. And there's a passage near the end will certainly have to be cut. . . . I shall have trouble with Mr. Campbell over that," resignedly; "he'll want it left in for a dead cert. Is Burnett here? You might send him in to me. . . ."

The reader was summarily dismissed.

He was glad that Alexander had praised the book; but it bothered him that Patricia should unnecessarily be kept on the rack pending Campbell's return from his native heath. For if Alexander spoke already of the "ads," there was not the slightest doubt that the book was virtually accepted.

He decided he could, in an unofficial capacity, betray as much to the girl. After all, her patience had already been unfairly stretched over the six weeks that "The Reverse of the Medal" had lain in the bottom drawer of the sitting-room at Pacific Villa. . . . Alexander could not know this, of course; but Gareth had promised her some certain relief by the morrow.

He wrote to her, saying he had news that could not possibly be imparted by letter—though why not, was a matter entirely between him and his God!—and would she do him the pleasure of

meeting him to-morrow (Saturday) at half-past two, at the bookstall of the Piccadilly Tube, and have tea with him ?

He told Kathleen that evening that he would be detained at the office the following afternoon for some special work connected with the " White Review." Unlike what had been her contemptuous method of tossing him some entirely inadequate excuse at the period when she was deceiving him with Napier Kirby, he was very punctilious in the details of his falsehood ; and kept on nervously elaborating it, feeling somehow less guilty as he did so. . . .

After all, it was business detaining him ; Alexander had as good as bidden him inform the author of " The Reverse of the Medal " that the firm was favourably considering the novel. . . . Had Alexander issued any such message ? By the time Gareth had separately dealt with Kathleen and with his own conscience, he could not remember any more what was the unveiled truth of the matter. . . .

" Shall we go for a saunter in the country ? " suggested Patricia O'Neill, directly on encounter ; " we can change from this line for Chorley Wood ; and the weather is just as I like it ! "

Through the Tube entrance could be seen a pale leaden sky, and a hailstorm lashing the pavement. But Gareth was so relieved at her easy assumption of command, that he assented enthusiastically to all she said : certainly, it was just the afternoon for a country stroll. . . . She directed him to the

booking-office ; then down to the train—change safely effected at Baker Street . . . and they found themselves perforce divided until arrival at Chorley Wood.

" Which way ? I'm quite helpless, you know ! " he smiled at her confidentially, as they emerged from the small country station into a slanting fury of hail.

" I know a bank where the wild thyme blows . . . about three miles from here. We'll go and pick it for tea. Come along—to the right ; I'm at home in these parts. Why, what's all this going on over my head ? " as, looking joyfully skywards, she found her view blocked by an affair of silk and spikes ; " my dear man, I appreciate your delicious old-world courtesy, truly I do, and none more than I . . . I used to paint it on satin. But for Heaven's sake remove that obstreperous object ! "

" I don't want you to get wet," said Gareth gently, still shielding her with his umbrella. " You had better take my arm."

Patricia's eyes danced . . . and suddenly she yielded. She was being rather good to him, for she detested umbrellas, never caught cold, liked best to swing along free and aloof, and had bitten back several flippantly witty comments to his request—simply because she both liked and respected this man with the rugged handsome face, and the wistful smile ; and instinct told her how immeasurably her refusal to accede to his manly protection, would hurt him at this juncture. Besides, why not accept with appreciative good grace the different wares that were offered her at

their different times of offering? Stirring taste of matched equality with Dacres Upton; and Temple's grave romantic charm that savoured of a bygone era. With the gesture of slipping her hand through his arm, Patricia's fancy envisioned him in a tall beaver hat, mull-coloured breeches, and three-caped overcoat . . . herself in dove-colour, with a large poke bonnet and a trustful expression.

"The vision passeth away, but the shadow of the gamp remaineth . . ." murmured Patricia piously, already beginning to be restive in her rôle of a-hundred-years-ago. "You might break the blow to me," she said aloud; "are they going to refuse my book?"

"Good Heavens, no! what a brute I am to let you be worrying your heart out all this time."

"Oh, I wasn't," Patricia owned frankly; "I've a sneaking sort of confidence in the worth of my own work which has upheld me during the damnably long time you have taken to decide on its merits. Forgive the language; I daresay it wasn't your fault."

Gareth winced. . . . And quickly told her what Alexander had said that morning.

"And you think that means——?"

"Acceptance; I'm quite sure of it. If Vincent Alexander admits anything to be tolerably average, it's equivalent to a delirious outburst from Mr. Campbell, our chief. They have about the same standard of judgment, but different ways of expressing it. You'll be summoned to an interview shortly, and then you'll see for yourself. Our

junior partner doesn't think authors ought to be encouraged."

"But the best writers publish with you, don't they? an awfully good array. I selected the firm for a first try because I thought I would look well in the catalogue all among your Graham Carrs and Ran Wymans and—let me see—who else is of the illustrious company?"

Gareth named a few more of "Campbell's Young Men"; wondering meanwhile if anything of his own forfeited glamour of belonging to that arrogant little band of intellects, was shared by the girl? or whether any other good firm of publishers would have satisfied her equally.

But just at present he could not feel quite as bitter over his lost chance as during the brooding dreary evenings at home.... Now, with her shoulder brushing his at every step, and her wind-bitten cheek poppy-stained against the blown gold of her hair. Presently he asked her solicitously if she were not tired?

"We're nearly there," she encouraged him, thinking this to be a confession on his part. "I'm taking you to a nice ramshackle mill, where a nice fat Yorkshire woman will give us tea and a fire and her family history: the miller drinks; and somebody quite important was once murdered there and they can't get used to the distinction; and she makes perfectly wonderful cake—Cornish heavy cake; and cures swine and makes them into ham; and has almost cured her husband. ... Oh, she's remarkably versatile!"

She was surprised at Gareth's delight in her description. The haphazard jumble of geography and jam and millers and murders and swine, appealed to him as a spinner of words. . . . He was very happy; and happier still when they finally arrived at their fairy-tale destination, and were able at last to cower from the malevolent weather in front of a jovial red fire, in the parlour of the mill-house. He insisted on removing Patricia's slouch hat, and her tweed jacket with its deep leather pockets, and her gauntlet gloves; and on strenuously holding up each dripping article in turn before the blaze . . . till her lazy laughing voice remonstrated that she had no use for toasted gloves, and would he please make room for her to dry her hair. . . . Turning, he saw that she had loosened the wet coils, which now lay in a rumpled glister about her shoulders.

"I'm enjoying this," she remarked with the innocent candour that, had he but known it, always presaged her most disconcerting remarks. "The miller's lady is getting our tea, and my book is as good as accepted, and you're well on the way to fall in love with me. . . . I put it to you—what could be more pleasant?"

"Sit down and let me scrape the mud from your shoes." He was glad of an excuse to avert his face; glad too to be kneeling in an attitude of worship in front of her; most of all glad that he was looking after her so well. . . . Yes, undoubtedly he was looking after her; he had conducted this expedition without a hitch so far; and he had been masterful over the umbrella—the memory

enfolded him in a sense of rest to which he had been a stranger for years.

Patricia lay back in her arm-chair, and watched him from under her drooping lids. Let matters take their course—why not? It was two years now since Dacres' curt good-bye on that nightmare thirtieth of December. Her dormant vitality was unashamedly eager for another awakening and a different awakening; anything less excellent in the same line would inevitably have invited comparison. But Gareth Temple touched a semi-humorous semi-maternal fount of tenderness within her, which Upton never had approached. . . . Her hand stole out towards his massive iron-grey head bent before her—then quickly she drew back, as their Yorkshire hostess entered with the Cornish heavy-cake and the teapot.

"Ah, now, I came all the way from London to taste that cake of yours, Mrs. Thorpe," Patricia announced gallantly.

Mrs. Thorpe looked lugubrious; and gave information that she was not Mrs. Thorpe, but Mrs. Thorpe's sister; and Mrs. Thorpe was dead; and she hoped the cake would be to their liking—"And that be her funeral-card yonder on wall; and ef ee want anything else ee'll be speakin' fur et . . ." the door closed.

"Oh, Hell!" ruefully exclaimed Patricia, whose tongue all too easily became profane. "I hope the talent runs in the family."

Evidently this was not the case. The cake proved to be sopping wet, and beyond all normal heaviness of heavy-cake.

"We simply dare not leave it untouched, after my injudicious remarks. I'm sorry for you, Gareth Temple, but you'll have to swallow double portion, as an act of fealty to me."

But at his apprehensive gaze towards the cake, she relented; and suggested instead that they should burn it. "Chuck it on the fire! Will it leave any traces of itself, I wonder?"

It did not. It merely put out the fire.

Patricia shrugged her shoulders: "A clear example of the survival of the fittest. Not only have we still on our hands a whole round damp cake in perfectly healthy condition; but we shall also have to account to the miller's deceased wife's sister for the suspicious demise of the fire!"

Gareth stood helplessly with the blackened cake in his hands: "Shall I—shall I shove it under the carpet? Or climb through the window and bury it in the garden? I'll do anything for you——"

"Commit any crime? This comes of it, when a publisher goes trapezing round with his mad young clients."

"I'm only reader to the firm," he reminded her.

"I don't know . . . somehow or other I shall always think of you as responsible for the publication of my book."

He was silent for a moment. And then, driven by an unconquerable impulse, said quietly: "I was very nearly responsible in preventing the publication of your book."

"What do you mean?"

He set down the cake on the table ; walked to the window ; stood with his back to her, seeking courage for confession.

Her voice came to him with a new grave note in it : " Mr. Temple—what do you mean ? "

Desperately he faced round. It had got to be done.

" I kept back your book—kept it back for six weeks—hid it away so that no one else should see it. I hated it . . . your book that contained the idea of my book—God ! shall I ever forget the reading of it ! And then I thought . . . if only I could get mine done first ; get it in first, and published first. . . . It was the same idea, you see —just the same idea. And it wasn't fair——"

He halted ; came slowly back to the fire ; stood looking down into it, head steadily averted from her eyes . . . the gold-shot gold-veiled green of her eyes. Then he went on more coherently :

" It was quite fair ; yours was ready first, so it ought to have had first chance with the public. I took it home to read in my official capacity ; and just because of that, it was unspeakable that I should have done such a thing—to you, dear, now that I know you . . . and to anyone. Pat O'Neill was just a name to me. I imagined him an ambitious boy—a boy with genius, who was bound to get there in the long run. But I was middle-aged, and a failure, and this one idea had come to me—and I could write only this one book ; it was my justification. Oh, all this is no excuse. I have no excuse. I'm only telling you how it happened. . . ."

Would she speak now? Say that she was disappointed?—more than that: utterly contemptuous; not because it was her own career he had tampered with, but because Patricia O'Neill could not condone—meanness. Would she never speak? He stood longing for absolution; honestly ashamed—yet shame not unmixed with a queer strain of gladness that he should have challenged her attention, stamped his personality upon her consciousness, with anything so definite as a confession.

"Is your book finished yet?"

"No."

"Then why did you send up mine . . . after all?"

He looked at her now. "You know why. . . ."

"Say it!" her mandate was imperial.

"I love you, Patricia." He did not seek to touch her, nor even to draw nearer. At any moment she might pronounce sentence. He felt her mind unfathomably concentrated on some purpose behind speech.

After a pause, she said in quite altered tones: "Which is the exact theme of my book which poached on yours?"

"I never said you poached; of course you didn't—any more than I. But I'm curious to know how and under what circumstances you were inspired by the duplicate theme. . . . It was adventure completed by pain—especially the adventure of a man and a woman. "The Round Adventure" was the title of my novel. And both our heroes carried about a secret fear, and recognized this fear to be part of the fun. And both

died by it—deliberately. You stumble across that sort of truth by what you didn't do yourself; at least, that was the way with me . . . the shadow-side of the circle, as well as the other . . . if you shirk it, you're never free—never free again."

She repeated musingly: "Never free again. You earn that sort of truth by what you *did* screw yourself up to do—at least, that was the way with me."

"And then you wrote a book about it. Because you had always wanted to write?"

"Not a bit of it! Just because I had an abstract discovery on my hands and wanted to get rid of it in some tangible form. It worries me when things lie about untidily and are wasted. I grant you it was quite exciting to discover I had a talent in my napkin."

Gareth asked, jealously, who was the prototype of Robert Nugent. And she favoured him with that smile at once tantalizing and enigmatic which the best of girls cannot refrain from using on one male when speaking to him of another.

"He was a dashing cavalry captain, and he treated me badly. Have I never struck you as a sorrowful victim to a man's perfidy?"

"You didn't care for him," infinitely relieved; "or you wouldn't make a joke of it."

She laughed. "I've paid my toll, and I'm free as air. It was a full two years ago—a long and wearisome tale. Do you want to hear it? Dying to, aren't you? And you're being so delightfully shocked at my bright and breezy allusions. . . . Own up! it would have cheered you considerably

if I'd gone off into a highly respectable decline. I'll start my narrative directly you unhook that attentive funeral expression—it embarrasses me to such an extent that I shall shortly break into bitter sobs. . . ."

"And now we're going home," when in the same mood of hectic flippancy, she had retailed her episode with Dacres Upton. Gareth was doubtful whether or not the flippancy were assumed. Nor did he feel safe in an assumption that Patricia had altogether forgiven him for the retention of her book. She was a baffling creature—why had she insisted on hearing him say that he loved her ? . . .

Had he known more of Patricia, it would have been clear to him that she was off again on one of her recurring star-scampers ; swept up by an idea to which her entire life of action must swiftly be altered and reset, no matter at what cost of destruction and upheaval.

She was silent all the way home, and abstracted ; only seemed to become re-aware of him at parting. "It's—all right, you know, Gareth."

"Is it ? Is it ? When shall I see you again ? "

"Oh, leave it to chance, my dear man ! "

He returned to Pacific Villa with the reaction of utter flatness upon him.

He heard no word from Patricia during the next ten days ; and tormented himself by the alternate beliefs that he had disgusted her utterly by his confession, that he had merely bored her on that afternoon they had spent together, or that he was expected now to take the initiative—do something

vigorous and unexpected—he had not the remotest idea what! She had said: "Leave it to chance"—which might have cloaked the message: "I leave it to you!"

But she must see, surely she must see, that he could not insolently thrust himself upon her presence, now, after the injury she was aware he had done her; by all the rules in the game, it was incumbent upon him to wait her pleasure in the matter. "It's all right, you know, Gareth!"—was that meant for reassurance?

And after all, what had he to do with all this fretting and questioning? He, who since sixteen springs had known that when the girl came along, he was not free. "Grant the path be clear before you. . . ."

Let him stick to his dream-girl, and safety. Dream-girl—he tried to recall her from the shadow-wood wherein she dwelt . . . but she faded to insipidity beside the vivid reality of Patricia.

His book, then, with last chapters waiting to be completed; the old anodyne of work. . . .

And what was the good of that, when with Mr. Campbell's return, "The Reverse of the Medal" would doubtless be put instantly into preparation for the spring season? There was no room in the world for two books of one idea.

And suddenly it struck him that he was bound to see Patricia directly the firm requested their interview with her. Why then, his mind might cease from nagging; he would see her then, for a certainty. Gareth mistrusted the offices of chance.

As he had anticipated, Leslie Campbell immediately hailed in "The Reverse of the Medal" a success which would rival even "Piccadilly," now booming in its cheap edition, and on the verge of dramatization and production. Pat O'Neill was to be sent for instantly, to sign a contract with an option on his next two books. Pat O'Neill was a find—the genius of the age—a feather in the cap of the publisher who discovered him! . . . The offices hummed with the new name. Alexander was impotent to stem the cataracts of his partner's enthusiasm. Campbell prattled about Pat O'Neill to Graham Carr, to the charwoman, to Mona Gurney, to the Heartbreaker. . . . It was a queer sensation for Gareth to hear the name bandied to and fro, and to realize that he alone had walked and talked with the owner.

And all this fizzing excitement might have been for his book. . . .

He would see Patricia enter through those swing-doors to-morrow at eleven-thirty; so rumour and young Burnett declared. . . .

All this might have been for his book. . . .

Thus, pendulum-wise, his mind feverishly ticked between the two points.

Leslie Campbell, meeting Gareth the next morning on the stairs, informed him confidentially and for the hundredth time, that the unknown celebrity was that day expected at the office. Then he hurried on to the inner room where Alexander already waited, his early presence a rare tribute to the impending interview.

Gareth found it well-nigh impossible to con-

centrate on his work. It was the more difficult since Ran Wyman and Graham Carr, the one accidentally and the other by intent, had both established themselves in the outer office, to catch a glimpse of their future colleague.

"Is he going to write for the 'White 'Un'?"

"Sure. And crowd us all out. Your days are numbered, Carr; you know what the chief is like over a new swan of intellect. And he's keen on paying out poor old Alex for taking that ghastly South-African serial."

"What—by those Frinton-on-Sea people?—Kate and Jasper Thurgood? Nonsense, Wyman, he hasn't! Not for the 'White 'Un'!"

"He has, and I've seen it," chuckled Ran Wyman. "Six hundred pages of 'Queer thraldom of the Veldt.' Treks and kraals and kopjes sprinkled like pepper; and a heroine with a Biblical name who stands all day long in a doorway, her blouse minus its top button to show the full generous curves of her bosom."

"Oh well, if Alex, curse his hardened greed-bitten soul, is out for that sort of thing, he'd better ask Gilman for a contribution at once. I came across a pearl of Gilman's the other day, in an old paper-back: 'The Earl of all the Beaumaynes behaved at the dinner-party with the simplicity and affability that distinguishes true breeding from its counterfeit brother'—yes, really, I'm not making this up . . . listen: 'Several times he even took an entrée-dish from the servant's hand, and helped Gracie himself, that the blushing girl might feel more at her ease. . . .' My servant can't under-

stand what's come to me lately at my little informal dinner-parties, when I keep on snatching the dishes away from him; he doesn't know that I'm emulating the aristocracy."

"You probably only succeed in behaving like its 'counterfeit brother.' But what a priceless person Gilman is!" Wyman picked up an eccentric headgear in yellow felt. "After all, I shan't stay to cheer our infant prodigy. His conceit will doubtless be enormous without the added compliment that is bound to be shed by my presence. Conceit is for the poor in spirit, *n'est ce pas, Jimmy, mon enfant?*" and tweaking, as he passed, the ear of the Heart-breaker, who interrupted his whistling by a soul-shattering yell, Wyman slammed the glass door; then returned to say: "Bring him round to supper some time next week, Carr, if he's presentable"—and ran downstairs.

"H'any more, Mr. Temple?"

"Yes, these can go." Gareth handed Jimmy a couple of brown-paper-bound manuscripts. He wished Carr and Burnett would likewise depart, and leave him in peace to . . . wait for Patricia. But they lingered on, exchanging anecdotes of the profession.

"Can I see Mr. Campbell?"

It was of Burnett, nearest the door, that the entrant made careless enquiry. He replied, in the melancholy and regretful tones reserved especially for unsolicited female intruders on the firm's precious time: "I'm afraid Mr. Campbell is away. Did you wish to make an appointment?"

"I have one, thanks. Say Miss O'Neill is here."

"'Er!" exclaimed Jimmy audibly, in the silence following this announcement; "an' I never tumbled to it!"

Carr came quickly forward, releasing the stricken Burnett of responsibility.

"Pleased to meet you, Miss O'Neill. The chief is most anxious to see you, of course. We've all heard such a lot of your novel. May I introduce myself?—Graham Carr."

Patricia had read "Piccadilly," and lingered a moment, talking to Carr. Then Campbell, mysteriously aware of her presence, burst open the door of his sanctum, and overwhelmed the author of "The Reverse of the Medal" in a gale of welcome; shaking her by both hands, congratulating her, congratulating everyone; introducing Alexander, unnecessarily introducing Carr, introducing Jimmy and young Burnett, and Gareth. . . . (Pat's eyes regarded him with perfect calmness from under her level brows!) . . . "A masterpiece! proud of ye, my lass, proud of ye!"—trying, against breathlessness and cough, to quote what the junior partner had said about the book. . . . Then a mild interpolation from that gentleman that they might as well talk some business, if Mr. Campbell had no objection—and the door of the private office sharply shut; young Burnett and Graham Carr exchanging admiring commentary down the stairs; their tread dying away; low continuous murmur of voices from the inner room; save for that, silence all about the reader, where he sat at his desk, amid a medley of proofs and manuscript, blotting-paper, ledgers, and foolscap.

. . . She would speak to him, coming out. Of course she would. She had simply relied on their secret understanding to explain her masquerade of indifference. . . .

The murmur of voices swelled suddenly louder, as Alexander opened the glass door, and came through to fetch a thick roll of paper ; the contract, no doubt. Contract, yes. Gareth knew exactly all the outward symbols of having got there, and how they would accumulate in the future : contract for the next book, and the book after that ; pile of advertisements and posters ; of press reviews ; of letters from unknown admirers and fellow celebrities ; discussions *re* American rights, and the cheap edition, and a possible édition de luxe with illustrations ; editors applying for photographs and favourite ' hobby ' of this new star on the firmament ; journalists appealing for an interview ; rival publishers with tempting and persistent bait ; diffident request from Alexander that Miss O'Neill might be prevailed upon to contribute (expensively) to the " White Review " . . . Gareth knew ; and all these prosaic and troublesome matters were poetry in his silent singing of them. Gareth knew ; he had imagined the scene often enough with—*not* Pat O'Neill as its hero. And a rueful smile twitched his lips, wondering if the girl were now astride of the table, in the delirium of insolent enjoyment once described by Graham Carr.

" And she'll swing her legs with the proper amount of—swing ! As for me——"

Well, here he sat in the outer office.

And behind the door marked in black lettering: "Private," a world given away. . . .

Would she speak to him—coming out?

"And now if you'll just put your name to the contract, Miss O'Neill——"

The preliminaries of the interview had been conducted on a note of frigid decorum from Alexander—in case anyone should suspect that he admired the cut of this creature's tan tailor-made—and with much demure diffidence on the part of Patricia; while Campbell dashed himself alternately on one and then the other, after the fashion of an all too youthful Aberdeen terrier; and: "down, sir, down!" expressed in Alexander's restraining: "Certainly, Mr. Campbell, I was just coming to that."

"And I should like to tell ye, my dear young leddy, what my friend Lennox, editor of the 'Critic,' said to me about your closing chapter when I showed it to him——"

"Wouldn't it be as well, Mr. Campbell, to get this attended to, before we begin repeating the eulogies which Miss O'Neill's work so richly deserves?"

"Alexander's impetuous," Campbell confided to Pat, in an aside. "Ah, he's young! It's verra reesky to tek a young partner."

All of which, Patricia found immensely entertaining.

Then Alexander brought in the contract. "Take it home to digest at your leisure, if you'd rather!" Pat ran her eye down the clauses.

" ' In the event of the author's death ' is rather tactlessly over-emphasized, isn't it ? "

Alexander explained that this was a mere matter of form.

" I rather like the chorus that runs through," she continued ; " ' Thirteen copies shall be reckoned as twelve.' . . . It would set rather well to part-music. Or is it a magic incantation to preserve me from harm ? "

The junior partner did not budge a muscle of his face ; but he said : " On the contrary, Miss O'Neill, it's a magic incantation to preserve *US* from harm."—And she discovered that she liked him.

Laying down the parchment on the table, she looked Campbell steadily in the eye : " Am I to understand that you're trying to do me out of elevenpence every time that twelve goes into a thousand, and one over to make thirteen ? Because I'm only an unprotected girl, without—without "—her voice quivered—" without even a nice kind agent to look after me ! "

" It's like this, ye see——" Campbell, very distressed, began to calculate the author's percentage of profit in ratio to the publisher's, with expenses deducted. And Alexander flipped the window-cord, and crossed his legs, and looked as if senior partners were really rather a mistake.

" You will find the last two clauses relate to your future books, Miss O'Neill. And now, if you'll sign——"

Patricia finished her perusal of the contract, and laid it aside. There was a curious impishness to

the upward-tilted corners of her mouth; but her eyes were misted and far-away. . . . In a hundred different directions, little shutters seemed to have flown open, with attractive vistas beyond . . . on and on and out . . . vigour of creation, fun of popularity, rivalry and applause and stimulation; then the next book, and the next . . . paths of literature—jolly little twisted paths . . . rewards of literature; literary jargon and literary companions, literary grooves and outlook. . . . Well—it would have been rather fun!

"I'm going to withdraw 'The Reverse of the Medal,'" she said. "I've decided not to publish, after all."

Gareth, straining his ears for all sounds from the inner room, was surprised to hear the word "murder" hurled forth in Campbell's distinctest bellow. . . . "Yes, I will say it, Alex; I mean it, Miss O'Neill. It's your ain genius ye're strangling, weelfully. . . ."

His voice died down again, probably beneath the admonishment of Alexander's lifted eyebrow.

And then Gareth remembered that the junior partner had, on first reading of the "Reverse of the Medal," remarked to him that a certain passage would have to be cut, and that there would be trouble with Mr. Campbell on the subject. The trouble was evidently in full swing. Perhaps Patricia had yielded too easily to Alexander's suave suggestions; too easily—for Leslie Campbell's liking.

Presently the door opened, and she came out.

Gareth did not notice if either of the partners were in attendance upon her exit. Breathlessly he waited ; and only when she was level with his desk, did he raise his eyes to meet hers. . . . She bestowed on him a careless nod, and without pausing, walked straight on to the outer door, and down the stone stairs.

. . . He sat very still, with the array of uncorrected proofs before him ; disappointment like a damp cloud weighing down his soul.

It was as he had dreaded. She had gone past him, actually and in spirit. She was a Personage now. And for weeks and months he would be doomed to move in an atmosphere effervescent with her triumphs ; the while she became ever more absorbed by her intellectual intimacies with " Campbell's Young Men " ; swang her legs from the table of Campbell's inner sanctum ; was impudent as she pleased to Alexander ; permitted the awed worship of Jimmy and young Burnett ; sometimes graciously remembered to nod to the reader in the outer office !

Worse, far worse, than if she had been the boy he had originally envisioned. Far worse—being Patricia. . . .

For that black hour, it seemed to Gareth that no nightmare could exceed in horror the nightmare of Patricia as One of Them. For that hour he found himself wishing that he had never yielded up her book from its hiding-place in Pacific Villa ; never confessed to her his part in its retention. . . .

Then, with a long breath as of one who has been stifled in a clogged slime-fettered stream, he made

an attempt to rise above this despondency of sick envy ; to regain his old resignation of last summer, —before little Moll Aynsleigh had stirred him with the pages of her "Spring-fret" ; before the dream-girl had slipped to him between the pale green beech-stems ; before he had been given an attic and a harbour to play with, and sweet prospects of solitude, and a book of his own ; before ambition was lit, and flamed, and was quenched again in the heart of the world ; and before the coming of Patricia to make him young as romance, and mad as romance, and in love with romance.

All over now. He took up his pencil, and went on quietly correcting proofs. Other people's books had the laugh of him after all. Other people's books would always have the laugh of him.

By and by he became vaguely aware that the partners were thoroughly upset over something that had occurred, and that all was not harmony in the firm since the interview with Pat O'Neill. He wondered if she could have refused to sign any contract till a literary agent should have inspected it in her interests. Campbell howled like a jackal at the very mention of an agent ; and invariably, and with the utmost lack of manners, turned the species over to Alexander to deal with.

But even that would hardly account for the "two thundering bad tempers" of which Burnett complained to Gareth later on : "Wonder what our new darling of the gods can have done to upset 'em. I asked quite innocently when 'The Reverse of the Medal' was to be sent to the printer, and the chief nearly bit my head off."

But lunch with his confidential secretary seemingly loosened Campbell's tongue ; so that Burnett, himself loyally sharing the prevalent mood of angry consternation, was able afterwards to enlighten Jimmy and the reader simultaneously.

" She's withdrawn the manuscript ! "

" Not never ! " Jimmy's eyes nearly goggled out of his head. And Gareth's : " What for ? " sounded sharp and unnatural to his own ears. His blood was singing so loudly in his head that he could hardly hear Burnett's reply :

" Lord only knows. If our firm's not good enough for my lady, I should like to know what is. But the chief says she's not taking it to anyone else—simply has changed her mind about it and doesn't want to have it published at all. It's *her* book—what is one to do ? Can't bring it out against the author's consent. Though it's criminal letting stuff like that be wasted. She can't have thought what good it might have done to US. We haven't nabbed a real winner since ' Piccadilly.' Well—there you are. . . ."

He awoke to the fact that the Heartbreaker was his sole audience. Gareth had disappeared.

Gareth was on his way to Sydenham.

The maid who opened the door informed him that Miss Patricia was out, but would probably be in presently, and would he care to wait ?

He paced for half an hour in her sitting-room. Then the furious barking of dogs and clang of bicycle bells drew him to the window—whence he just received a fleeting vision of Patricia, in a warm crimson jersey, coasting full speed down the hill,

and leaping from the saddle, encumbered by an adoring frenzied surge of dogs and flappers. . . . Then she swung, with that loose supple movement of the hips that was so intensely hers, into the porch and out of sight.

He stood upright in the middle of the room, heart beating violently.

Footsteps down the passage. Her voice, clear and loud and fresh: "Down, Rix! Down, you brute! . . . Ah, that's right—good fellow——" And she entered, still clamorously surrounded; hair in a bright tangle; cheeks aglow.

"Hullo—it was dear of you to come. . . . Now then, off with you, the whole pack; I'm done with you for the moment—private audience awaiting me. No, Rix can stop. No, Hetty, I'm not bringing the handsome gentleman into the schoolroom for tea—Great Scott, what next! and you and your pals the merest puling babes, who haven't even learnt yet not to whisper in company. . . ." Remonstrating noisily, the three healthy schoolgirls departed, with the terriers at their heels. "Let me introduce you—this is Vercingetorix, my special property." Pat talked very fast, as though not quite ready yet to hear what the man had to say; "Not quite so affectionate, my angel!" as the four-foot-high St. Bernard dabbed clumsily with his tongue at Gareth's face; "You needn't use all the syllables of his name at once; but the man who gave him to me had called him Tiny . . . can you conceive of anything less subtle? I informed him that his was a primitive type of humour, and he departed utterly crushed. That's right—

not an inch of room for us ! " for by now Vercingetorix had contrived to put most of himself on to the divan, where he lolled in voluptuous pomp, with a big rough sheet of red tongue hanging out ; " . . . bless you, we love to deny ourselves for you ! . . . He's a mere puppy, you know ; eight months old ; has only just started to grow, really. And the pathos of it all is that he thinks he's small ; he does, indeed. He tries to behave like an ordinary puppy—these bundlesome little things that you can pick up with one finger. And I ask you—look at him ! "

But for all her casual and airy chatter, Patricia could not fail to perceive that Gareth's looks were for her. She tossed off her jersey, picked up a book and laid it down again . . . and faced him, rather a tremulous smile on her lips, but with head erect, and chin more than ever dented.

" Well, my man. . . ."

" Why did you do it ? "

She did not speak—but then her hands came out in a swift movement towards him, as though she were giving—giving——

And he seized them and held them.

" Patricia, was it for me ?—Was it ? . . . You cared enough for that ? "

" Oh, but I'm so glad if it's to be your book ! " she cried impetuously . . . and he felt as though he stood in an open place, the centre of a great gale of love.

" Adorable. . . ." And surely he could allow himself to kiss her, gently, for gratitude's sake. . . . But control left him at the quick hot response of

her lips. . . . And Heaven had showered its madness upon him before control ever came back again——

He released her. Remained standing just where he was, arms hanging inert at his sides. His eyes were weary and troubled. Presently, replying to her silent questioning gaze, he said slowly :

"Yes—but you see . . . there's Kathleen. . . ."

CHAPTER IV

"BUT I didn't know he was married," murmured Patricia to the St. Bernard, after Gareth had gone.

Still, now that she had placed him in the middle of her world, and in a royal ecstasy of sacrifice offered up to him her previous middle-of-the-world, the very book of her heart—it were folly now to make another sacrifice of the altar itself. Patricia had been sincere in her half-laughing remark to Hetty several years ago, that she could not be bothered to give up the little things of life; but that one day when she found someone worth while, she would revel in the supreme indulgence of yielding up her all; flinging gift after gift upon the bonfire, to feed it: her lesser loves, her friends, her memories, the world's opinion of her, her tangible possessions, her individuality even. . . .

She wanted fervently to vindicate herself of the self-charge of egoism; and chafed at the tardy arrival of the person who would be big enough.

Then, as in a transient flash, it seemed to her that Gareth Temple stood revealed as this person. The revelation happened at the mill-house during that pause after he had owned to her his tamper-

ings with the fate of her book. Something in the proud, sad humility of the confession, confession of weakness and a lost ideal, threw him up to her, clear-edged against a luminous background. . . . What a blind idiot she had been to expect something worth while in its mere superficial meaning —something magnificent and successful and compelling. This man, this strayed idealist, excusing nothing, asking nothing, acquiescent in his own ill-equipment for everyday contest ; this sensitive dreamer, with the fine strong face—enough of quick humanity in him to sin, and enough of nobility to confess his sin. . . . Surely he was worth while ! The divine failure . . . to him should be her bonfire.

And he loved her. She had to make him say outright he loved her. It gave her the right to do this which she contemplated.

The fortnight between her resolution and her interview with Leslie Campbell she spent in sorrowful discovery of the extent to which her book mattered after all—output of the best of her brain ; how she would have rejoiced in its publication ! It was no good telling herself that the labour was the fun, and ought to be compensation in itself. The suggestion met with no inner response. . . . A book written must be a book shared, or it was purposeless, a mere emotional clearance upon paper. A book written must be a book published. . . . Ruthlessly she had murdered her brain-child—as once she had murdered love-memory. . . .

And again she tingled to a queer excitement

in being able to perform these active interferences with destiny.

Yes—Gareth's book should be published when hers was withdrawn to clear the way for him. He loved his book. It could not but be a beautiful and scholarly expression of what was greatest in himself. Posterity would lose nothing by the exchange.

But that interview with the partners had cost her something—had pulled out resolution to the snapping-point ; they had dangled success so very alluringly before her eyes. . . .

Gareth's visit, his inarticulate incredulous wonder, had been reward enough. Tenderly she had loved him, and worshipfully. . . . But when suddenly he forgot control, and had held her and kissed her as a man kisses a woman—sometimes, then she too had forgotten tenderness and worship, and had given him back the love a woman gives to a man—once.

. . . And then he had spoken of Kathleen. It was a slight shock, but the girl recovered quickly. She was clenched in her determination that her life and Gareth's should be fused. Obstacles only incited her the more. The question now to be solved was the nature of this particular obstacle. The situation was an old one : husband and wife and the third ; but Patricia introduced a variation by resolving in her most sunny headlong fashion to go and see Kathleen, and find out—as she expressed it—exactly what she was up against. Perhaps this wife would also prefer to fight an adversary whose strength she had measured. It

was a mere absurd convention that the rival protagonists for the soul and body of a man should not meet and talk it over. Besides, Patricia was curious: was Kathleen fond of him? passionately fond of him? Was she a weak drab little creature for whom one's pity and forbearance would willy-nilly be demanded?—or else a shrew and a tyrant, who loudly and stubbornly would stick out for her rights in Gareth? Kathleen . . . intellect, or flesh-and-blood, or a habit? Whichever it was, she would have to go on the bonfire!

Patricia went the next afternoon to Pacific Villa.

. . . So this was where Gareth lived. . . . A queer lump came to her throat at sight of the commonplace, hideous little red-brick residence in its row of commonplace red brick. And if this was the house—what might not the wife be like? . . . Some pretty waxen thing he had idealized when he was dreaming through his twenties; some pretty brainless thing who had grown querulous from social disappointment. . . .

"Oh, my poor man—my poor fine man . . ."

All this, rushing through her mind, as the tousled maid led her through the tiny hall, and into the parlour.

"Miss O'Neill, ma'am."

And a sigh of relief from Patricia, at sight of the keen haggard face turned questioningly towards her. No, she need make no allowances for this woman; this woman was a fighter.

"Don't say you're pleased to see me; you won't be in a minute, when I've told you why I

came. Look here—do you mind if I go straight to the point? . . . because I'm rather nervous really; and you do look as if you were of the right stuff!"

Kathleen raised her thin black brows. "You flatter me. I haven't the faintest notion who you are, but a sensation is always pleasant on a dull day. . . . So sit down, and make yourself at home."

"You're sarcastic—good. It's not a weapon I can use myself; not with much effect, that is—but I can appreciate it in others. Hasn't Gareth told you about me?"

"No—but you have . . . now. Well, under the circumstances, it's original of you to call upon me, Miss O'Neill."

"Taken it like a brick," murmured Patricia. "But you aren't fond of him, which accounts for the calmness. That's an enormous weight off my mind. Now, as you can't be quite sure of the circumstances, even after that tell-tale quiver in my voice which I suppose gave the whole show away—or was it my damnable habit of flushing?—do you mind if I just enlighten you?"

"Go on."

Patricia sprang to her feet, clasped her hands behind her, fingers tightly interlocked. In spite of her assumption of lightness, she was finding this interview with Gareth's wife something of a strain.

"I'm in love with your husband, and he's in love with me. We've known each other about a month. I want him, and you've got him . . . and unless you and I talk it out clearly and

coherently, we can go on messing about for ages. I hate mess—I fancy you do, too. And Gareth is too chivalrous ever to be quite blunt with you over facts."

"I'm glad to hear that you appreciate Gareth," remarked Kathleen, darting her youthful rival an upward look of rapier mockery.

"*You* don't!" Patricia flashed back.

"Indeed I do. With all my heart."

Patricia sat down again, restlessly, on the arm of her chair. "Your heart is not involved in the matter, is it? Quite frankly, now? You must have been dying to say so to someone, since ages. And why not to me?"

"And why shouldn't we all be great friends?—is that the idea? . . . Really, my dear child, your views are startlingly up-to-date, and your insolence truly remarkable. Are you aware that in the sight of convention and our neighbours, you've done me a bitter wrong?"

"I haven't—yet. And it's not a question of you and me; it's a question of Gareth's happiness."

"Ah . . . Gareth's happiness."

"Sneer!—that proves how much it needs attending to."

"Well . . . what do you want me to do?"

"Divorce him."

"Hm! You might have hurled that at me on entrance, instead of shilly-shallying."

Patricia fell into the trap. "Did I shilly-shally? How utterly abominable of me. I apologize. But I really and truly brought in the word as soon as I decently could."

"Don't reproach yourself with an excess of consideration. Does Gareth know you've come on this mission?"

"Heavens, no! Wouldn't he be wanting to shield you from me, and shield me from you, and shield everybody all round—except himself . . . the darling!"

Kathleen smiled. "In my very presence?"

"Certainly. I'm not ashamed of loving the man. Mrs. Temple—will you divorce him—if we give you cause?"

"If you so adore him, why . . . bother about a divorce?"

"I know what you mean," said Patricia slowly; "and I wouldn't be afraid for myself. The marriage service is a mere trifle to me—may the daughter of a good mother be forgiven for saying so. But Gareth is not the right type of man for an unorthodox love-affair. He would be worrying himself that I was worrying over all the slights and snubs that didn't matter. . . . And we'd both end by worrying together. I've thought it all out."

"I'm sure you have," said Kathleen politely.

"Isn't all this scathing irony rather unnecessary? I could be marvellously witty and flippant if I chose to exert my talents that way. But I had a sort of feeling that an interview between us two ought to be conducted in a more reverent spirit."

The other shrugged her shoulders. "Oh—reverent!" She leant back her head against the worn antimacassar, and half closed her eyes.

Patricia, watching her, thought in a spasm of generous admiration, how handsome she was, with her aquiline features and sombre colouring and bent weary mouth—"Like an Indian brave . . ."

And Kathleen, behind the mask of immobility, was absorbed in a concentrated vengeful loathing of the man who had dared shatter her romance, her last hot chance of romance . . . and then himself flaunt a love-affair. Let him go? Divorce him? Make the way easy for him with this splendid wilful young creature who thought him divine? God in heaven, no! . . . She would keep him from happiness, keep him dragging on beside her, though his proximity were doubly hateful to herself. Never again would she know the thrill of being desired. . . . Gareth should be made to suffer now for having, in an access of petty malevolence, interfered with her on the night she was to have joined Napier Kirby.

. . . Slowly she lifted her eyelids, to encounter Patricia's impatient gaze.

"Well?"

"I don't think I'm going to divorce Gareth for your pleasure. As I happen to be in possession, I'll stick to my nine points of the law, thanks."

The girl's lip curled scornfully. "The dog-in-the-manger attitude—I thought better of your intellect. What good will it do you, to live on with a man you don't love? Besides, it's indecent!"

"Not indecent to throw yourself at the head of a married man, I suppose?"

"Yes, very—if I had. Look here, don't let's descend to vituperation. You won't give him up. And you won't give me a reason."

"Are we on a level with our claims, that I should have to give you a reason?"

"Yes; tradition kicked in the wind—we are. And you want your freedom—oh yes, you do!—and won't take it. You even faintly dislike Gareth—but he's yours. . . . Frankly, Mrs. Temple, you make me feel as though I'd put my hand in a glue-pot."

The ring of stripped exasperation in Patricia's voice sounded on Kathleen's consciousness with an uncanny sense of familiarity . . . and not for the first time that afternoon. It was her own voice speaking to Gareth—trying to urge him to some clear decision. . . . This girl was strangely an echo of her own girlhood; but with all the gathered advantages of a new generation; so that she marched gaily and by right-of-way where Kathleen had been forced to struggle through thorny barriers.

But what a queer fatality of blindness that Gareth should not perceive the resemblance; that again he should be drawn and held and enchanted by the same personality that during sixteen years' intimacy had been goading him to madness. . . . If he were able to marry this girl, she would find him out soon enough; soon enough be up against that indefinable rottenness that Kathleen had named Atrophy of the Initiative. And this girl would not bear with it, any more than Kathleen had borne with it; but would

contest it with all her vitality and passionate impatience . . . and Gareth would hear again that driving note he so detested, from the lips he had newly kissed in love; and be hurt as he had not been hurt for years . . . a great many years; because since he had ceased to love Kathleen, she had had to flog him harder and ever harder before she could produce any effect on his numbed spirit. . . .

Where he cared once more, he could once more quiver to pain.

So would it not be a far subtler revenge, and far more poignant, to let him go to this girl . . . and let him meet with his disillusion all over again?

Kathleen made her decision. . . .

"I've changed my mind," she said abruptly to Patricia; "I do want my freedom. You can have Gareth—when you like."

Patricia drew her brows together, puzzled at this sudden yielding of obduracy.

"You mean you'll divorce him?"

"Not necessary, my dear. Gareth and I are not married."

. . . After a pause. "You seem astounded? And yet you remarked just now that you were ready enough to dispense with the ceremony yourself."

"Yes—I am . . . but—— This is 1913, and we're beginning to open our minds to the proposition of free love—monogamous free love, at least. But surely it was an unusual step, twenty years ago?"

"Sixteen years," corrected the other sharply; "I'm not quite prehistoric yet."

"... And Gareth—I can't imagine him——" For the first time the girl had dropped her easy self-possession; spoke in broken stammering sentences. She had set forth to deal with the situation of a wife to be discarded as quickly and kindly as possible. ... And here was her man's mistress veritably unburdening herself of him as though he were an encumbrance: "You can have him when you like." ... It staggered Patricia to find her wish so attainable; as though she had been gazing longingly at an object set about with spiked railings—and suddenly the railings were fallen flat to the ground, and she might advance as she chose. ...

"Did Gareth tell you I was his wife?"

"N-no. No, I don't think he did." Patricia laughed, and some of her embarrassment went. "D'you know, I'm afraid I was conventional enough to take it for granted. The Lord knows why! I've a decently improper point of view as a rule. But Gareth does give the impression of what is called 'a marrying man.'"

"You're right—and very keen-sighted. He is a marrying man. It was I who was fool enough to try and remould what nature had cast him for. I had lived too long and too intimately with a commonplace couple—my brother and his wife—and had gradually sickened at the state of marriage which deadened live things to clay. I thought that omission of the actual ceremony would remove that possibility. ... What do you think

of my brilliant reasoning?" with a harsh laugh.

And Patricia said gently: "It worked out to exactly the same thing, of course."

"It worked out—a little bit worse."

. . . A barrel-organ started to play its tunes in the road just outside. The sudden loud jangle fell startlingly into the silence which had succeeded Kathleen's remark. . . .

"Will you have some tea, Miss O'Neill?"

"Funny!" thought Patricia; "that's what I'd have said at this juncture. . . ." And aloud: "Thanks—yes, with the utmost goodwill. It would be so melodramatic for us to refuse to break bread with each other."

"I appreciate your magnanimity. Especially as you've obtained what you wanted from me."

"You have a pretty gift for repartee, haven't you?"

Kathleen went to the door, and gave an order to Maggie. "What a tragedy for Gareth to have had to live with it for sixteen years . . . is that what you were thinking?"

It was. And Patricia owned it cheerfully; thanking her stars the while that she had this woman to cope with, and not a tearful bit of helplessness, who would have pleaded: "Don't take him away—don't—he's all I've got. . . ."

She was curious to hear more of the long-drawn-out liaison which had proved such a failure. "How did you first meet, you and Gareth?" as her hostess poured out the tea which had just been brought in, and tendered the thick bread-

and-butter. These were curious circumstances for a friendly meal . . . and as their eyes met, each gave the other reassurance as to her own appreciation of the existing blend of humour and irony.

"Where did we meet? Oh, accidentally, on a summer holiday. I was a teacher, shepherding a flock of chattering schoolgirls. He was a good young man, seeing life with a band of touring botanists. We ran away from our respective responsibilities, and enjoyed a most delightful month at a mountain village called Alpenruh—do you know it? No? Perhaps Gareth will take you there for your honeymoon. . . . It was an entirely platonic affair, and it should have ended as such. But when we got back to London, our horrified families seemed to expect Gareth to repair the wrong he hadn't done me—and he went to pieces before their attitude. One day he came galloping up to me on a metaphorical charger, insisting that I should marry him. . . ."

The organ outside effected an uneasy gulping transition from one tune into another. . . . And absent-mindedly Kathleen refilled Patricia's cup, as she brooded over that scene in Nelly Morrison's dining-room. . . . Nicholas's toys bestrewing the floor—old Mr. Jeyne asleep in the corner—Nelly ostentatiously removing the children, to give her sister-in-law a chance.

And Patricia too was seeing a vision—a serious young knight, incredibly handsome, with his liquid dark eyes and waving black hair, setting forth on his quest for right. . . . She wished she

had known Gareth in those days; how tenderly she could have loved his rapt boyish ideals.

This Kathleen—she was like an eternal east wind; stimulating to those who liked the chill and the nip of it—Patricia did, for one—but deadly suffering to a nature unpractical and romantic, like Gareth's.

"You refused to marry him?"

"Yes. I talked him over. I was older than he—four years older; and had the stronger will. Our respective families promptly cast us off, as might have been expected. And thus we embarked upon—the idyll of Pacific Villa. You see what it's made of us."

"And neither of you broke away? You dragged on—feeling like this?"

The melancholy in Kathleen's eyes deepened to bitterness.

"We had nothing tangible to break away from, except the necessity of keeping up an illusion that it was all divine. . . . And you try breaking away from that! It's like a tough sticky web . . . an invisible web—I'd sooner have steel chains to smash. Break away?—when already you are free, except for voluntary propinquity. . . . My dear child, you are very beautiful and immensely wise—but you don't know what you're talking about. I couldn't budge, because *I* had talked Gareth into the situation, and had to keep up a feverish pretence that it was all right—all right—quite different to the usual dreary matrimonial failure; bound to be different, because we weren't married. For my vindication in his eyes, in my

own eyes, for my pride's sake, I had to keep up the strain. . . . And besides, I dared not own that our life was exactly, down to its hatefullest detail of a burst boiler on a winter's day, what I had so dreaded——"

Patricia broke in impetuously. "And Gareth would not break away for fear you might think it was because he held you in any less esteem than if he had married you. That was like Gareth——"

"Hm. Always ready with a pretty picture to justify him, aren't you?"

"And you're always ready with a taunt to ridicule him. It would be vain to pretend I'm violently astonished the household wasn't all harmony, Mrs. Temple——"

"My name is Morrison. I've anticipated your future title long enough, Miss O'Neill. . . . More crimson blushes? That's an incongruous charm of yours, considering how extremely modern you are in all else."

"Yes, isn't it? Quite old-world, one might say!" Unabashed, Patricia rose to go. "Good-bye. I won't say that we've had such a delightful chat and when are we to have another?—for I take it that this interview is for one performance only. But—wish me luck, won't you? Just because you're the last person in the world from whom I ought to be begging good wishes." She held out her hand; Kathleen took it.

"Certainly I wish you luck," stolidly and without hesitation. Then with an almost witch-like lilt of voice and twist of the lip, she spoke again. "I leave Gareth to you with the completest confidence."

"That's—fine of you! . . . Good-bye——"

Patricia ran down the three steps, and clanged the little gate behind her.

"And she is a jolly fine person," she reflected further, as she walked rapidly away from Pacific Villa; "but it was her fault, all the same, that they came to grief, and that his whole career was mucked up. Lord! sixteen years at that pitch of strain, in that beastly toadstool house, pretending all the time. . . ." She vowed that she would make up to Gareth for this woman's hard unmerciful judgments. And again she murmured, as on entrance: "My poor man. . . ."

"Good-bye. I'm going."

Gareth looked up in bewilderment at the sight of Kathleen, in her outdoor clothes, standing in the dining-room doorway.

"Going? Where?"

"Just going. You won't try to stop me this time, will you?"

"Yes; certainly I will. You can't walk out of the house in this—this haphazard fashion."

"You mean, that I should discuss it for weeks beforehand, and write all the luggage-labels twice over. That's not my way, Gareth. Besides, as was rightly observed by that big radiant young person with the green eyes, it's indecent, under the circumstances, for us to go on sharing . . . our meals."

"Patricia!"

"She had tea with me this afternoon," Kathleen explained casually, drawing on her worn-out

gloves; "and both being competent creatures, we settled up matters without you. By the way, you might let me have some money; any loose cash you have about you. We'll call it wages in lieu of notice, to save my dignity. My boxes will be sent after me directly I let Maggie know my address; I've given orders. Thank you, that's plenty. . . . Good-bye."

"But—what are you going to do? Kathleen, I *must* know . . . considering——"

"Considering the long and happy years we've dwelt together?" she scoffed. "You've not the slightest claim to know, except sentimentalism. And I don't want bits of you still hanging about me, like wool from the box in which I've been smothered. Take the girl—I genuinely congratulate your choice—and be thankful you're quit of me—as I'm thankful to be quit of you!"

That stabbed him, even in his dazed condition resultant upon her announcement. After all, he had endured patiently during sixteen years of monotonous strife. He had not run away . . . not attempted once to run away. "I'm sorry, Kathleen. I did my best . . ."

"Especially on a certain occasion last October. If you had let me go then. . . ."

And again, subdued by the gloom of passionate regret which for an instant darkened her face, he repeated, humbly and ineffectually: "I'm sorry. . . ."

"Well—we needn't linger any more over the farewells, need we?"

"Won't you wish me luck?" he entreated.

And wondered why her laugh grated so harshly. . . . They were really humorous, these two people in love, each begging her for a final blessing on their union.

"With Patricia? Oh yes, I wish you luck." . . . An elfin gleam shot on him from beneath her heavy eyelids.

A few seconds later, and he heard the front door bang.

He stood motionless, one hand clenched on the soiled plush tablecloth . . . gradually it relaxed.

He had once been given a book and his freedom. Both had been snatched away from him. Now both were restored.

Wonderingly, he looked round at the walls; hideous dingy pattern of red flowers clumped on a brown background. This room, in which he and Kathleen had sat for two meals a day—three on Sundays—sixteen years—one must subtract the recurring summer holidays . . . or add them on—which was it? . . . And the dusty black cat with its staring eyes had overheard all that had been said at those meals—all that had not been said.

He took his writing-case to the table; and began a letter to his house-agent.

"PACIFIC VILLA,
"HAMMERSMITH.

"DEAR SIR, "*Jan. 6th.*

"I am desirous of sub-letting this house, which is mine on a seven-years' lease renewed two years ago. Will you therefore . . ."

PART IV

CHAPTER I

"VERY distinguished-looking, with all that wavy grey hair," pronounced Mrs. O'Neill, after the first visit paid her by the prospective son-in-law whom Patricia had so bewilderingly tumbled out of the clouds; "but—Pat darling—he's almost old enough to be my husband."

"I shall take the utmost care that he is not," retorted Pat, sitting on the sofa-end, and puffing at her cigarette; "forgive me for mentioning that you've already had two of these necessary aids to comfort."

"And not an especially good match, is he?"

"Rotten bad!" her step-daughter assented sunnily; "reader to a firm of publishers, at two-fifty per annum or thereabouts. Excellent dad, to have left each of us girls two hundred a year when we marry."

"But with your fascination, Pat—I hate to make you conceited, but Dr. Andrews was saying only the other day that you were a ripe young Amazon."

"Indecent old satyr! Believe me, mother, I've considered my prospects mathematically. I put it to you: two-thirds of the men I meet are

smaller than myself. No man can do with a girl who overtops him. Rule them out. Of the remaining one-third, two-thirds again have a preference for slender little clinging maidens. Which reduces my chances to one-third of one-third of the entire male population."

"Even that allowance might be enough for you," remarked Mrs. O'Neill, who was not devoid of gentle humour.

"Oh well," with a gurgle of laughter, "leave it at Gareth."

"I certainly was favourably impressed by the way he holds open the door for one."

"The lamb!" Patricia whispered to her cigarette.

"Only it's all so—— How often had you met him, dear, before he proposed to you?"

"Thousands of times. Twice, to be exact."

She had already told her mother that she went to the firm of Leslie Campbell to purchase a special book published by them, which the libraries had informed her was out of print. For Gareth's sake she wanted as few persons as possible to know of "The Reverse of the Medal."

"We ought to ask some of his family, his near relations, to dinner. It's the proper thing to do. Do you know any of them, Pat?"

"Only Kathleen," murmured Patricia.

"His sister? How nice. Would she come?"

"N-no. I'm not sure that it would be frightfully nice. . . . Perhaps it had better not be put to the test, anyway. He has no relatives, mother; at least," darkly, "not presentable ones."

Mrs. O'Neill took the hint. But she was anxious not to offend etiquette over the details of Pat's engagement. People might hint that any deviation from the usual course was because it was not Ann engaged, or Hetty, her own daughters. She was always morbidly afraid of being saddled with the qualities of the traditional and legendary step-mother. And she happened to be warmly fond of Pat, and very dependent upon her.

"Then the firm of publishers, his employers—should they be invited to dine? What did you say were their names? Pat, I can see no reason to laugh."

"Sweetheart . . . if I were walking out with a salesman at Lipton's, I shouldn't expect you to entertain Sir Thomas to high tea. The notion of a godfatherly Mr. Campbell and Mr. Alexander cutting the cake for me and Gareth, overpowers me. It does, verily."

"I only hope, Patricia," with dignity, "that considering the disgraceful haste of your engagement, you will not require the offices of anyone to cut the cake, for a long while to come."

"Heavens, no. Not for ages. Not until the tenth of February." Patricia sprang from her perch to anticipate with a rush of dishevelling kisses any objection the good lady might be likely to raise. For this was the twenty-ninth of January.

Neither she nor Gareth cared to wait. Hers was not a nature to brook delay; and he was feverish lest again he should be thwarted of this gift of wedlock which promised to be so fair. He had always desired to be married; as a young man,

dreamt of it; later, mused on the state with the wistful envy of one who sees no hope of it for himself. All the failure of his union with Kathleen, he now arbitrarily set down to the fact that she had never been his wife. Nor did he realize that owing to his dislike of the relationship between them, it was never accepted by them openly and proudly; in which acceptance might have lain their only possibility of finding happiness. It was he who had first created tension, by his sensitive disposition to avoid the subject; skirmishing round every allusion; doing his utmost to spare her, taking for granted a shame in her which had never existed save by his assumption. Thus Gareth had damaged irrevocably Kathleen's experiment of a passionate free comradeship, by his always delicate and chivalrous attempts to reassure her that they were tighter bound than if they had been indeed man and wife. Little deceptions and pretences and silences, swelling to giant proportions . . . till they were a guilty furtive nagging couple, nothing more noble than that; pitiful enough end to his boyish high hopes—to the Songs his Mother Taught Him.

And suppose there had been children—Gareth shuddered at the illimitable possibilities of misery entailed. . . .

But Patricia had consented to marry him. They might have as many children as they pleased. And a home without the forbidden subject to make it ghastly. It would be all right this time—all right—Gareth Albert Temple to Patricia

O'Neill, on the tenth of February, nineteen hundred and fourteen.

In anticipation of which date of release, release from the intolerable wearying necessity of the outcast forever compelled to beat out a fresh track untrodden by custom, Gareth, on the night of February the ninth, stretched the cramped limbs of his dreams, with a great sigh of thanks to Patricia, the wonderful girl who had freed him from his bondage of freedom. On the morrow he might slacken his tautly drawn initiative; settle down into a condition socially and legally sanctioned. Oh, the hushed benison of rest which Patricia had achieved for him! Patricia . . . beloved . . . he murmured her name as though in prayer to a goddess. Patricia . . . wife . . . and his very soul he could have flooded like moonlight at her feet. He would be such a husband as had never before existed, so faithful in guardianship and vigilant in loyalty. Supposing she were ever ill—almost he could have wished her ill at once, for an opportunity to set in motion his solicitude and tenderness. Patricia . . . home . . . with—hazily—a luxurious aroma about it of comfort and harmony, which Kathleen had never succeeded in imparting to Pacific Villa; but which his imagination infallibly allied to Patricia, as mistress of the quaint squat old-maidish house they had rented furnished in St. John's Wood.

He recollected with drowsy satisfaction . . . the dining-room fire was burning low now, and it was late—his last night at Pacific Villa . . .

the sybaritic effect of Patricia's own sitting-room at Sydenham.

Raising his heavy eyes, he became aware of the black china cat ; and by way of a last precaution, knocked it with his foot off the mantelpiece, and broke it.

On the same memorable eve of the tenth, Mrs. O'Neill was trying to make up her mind to go to Patricia's room, and talk to her for a little while . . . the child had no mother of her own. The bride-to-be had behaved all through dinner with what looked like the wildest high spirits, but which Mrs. O'Neill did not doubt was hysteria ; and then in the traditional manner of brides-to-be, had vanished early to bed. Mrs. O'Neill's hesitation in going up to her, arose from a misty apprehension—engendered she knew not where nor how—that she would find Patricia lying across her bed, shaken by sobs, and moaning : " I can't ! I can't ! I can't ! " . . .

And what was the proper conversational reply to be made by one who was not quite the girl's mother, when confronted by this painful stress of emotion, the sweet-faced little lady had not the remotest notion. But she nerved herself finally to go upstairs. As she neared Pat's room, she heard sounds that were ominous. And yet—surely, surely it could not be that the girl was *singing ?*

" Pat . . . how—how are you ? "

" Very brisk indeed, darling," Patricia assured her ; Patricia, who was neither prone across the

bed, nor in floods of tears, nor protesting that she would rather die . . . nor in any way giving vent to maidenly sentiments.

Mrs. O'Neill was mightily relieved; and—faintly disappointed.

"Is there nothing—nothing you want to ask me about, my dear? I thought . . . I wondered . . ."

And suddenly Patricia understood; and understood the disappointment as well; and choked down the mischievous retort so ready to her lips. The twentieth-century girl has little need of this stammering hour of instruction. . . . But Pat crossed the room to her stepmother, and dropped on both her knees in front of her, taking her hands.

"I'm so glad you came up. . . . Yes, please, you can help me. . . . I want to know——"

They went for a short wedding-journey to the Fen Country. Patricia had roamed before on and about these eerie desolate lands; and found a curious fascination in the monotony of ancient sea-wall and sluggish river, and sail flat against the unchanging horizon. So did Gareth; at least, he thought he did, but was not quite sure. He was so happy that he would have glorified Wormwood Scrubbs or Manchester as ideal honeymoon resorts. He flung such quantities of word-drapery over the landscape; over the little inn at which they stayed; over sky and water and oozing mud-creeks; over Fen-legend and tradition, and the Isle of Ely and the port of Lynn; over Patricia herself and the future, and the books

that might be written—should be written, and the books that were already written ; and over infinity, and the wonder of their daily breakfast together . . . until Patricia protested at last that in view of the fact that she had married a strong, silent man, his fluent babblings were disgracefully out of character.

Then home to number seventeen Blenheim Terrace. Gareth returned to his work at the firm of Leslie Campbell. And Patricia applied herself seriously to the suppression of her restive desire for authorship. . . . It was *fun* to be aware of this power within her, and voluntarily to keep it under hatches like a mutineer ; fun . . . perpetual bonfire to the altar she had set up in the middle of her world ; fun, to refrain from writing, that Gareth should write and write and write.

She awoke to the fact that Gareth was not writing. And that his book still awaited completion. Seemingly he had forgotten all about it. Incredible. She spurred him with eager reminder.

" It's nearly finished," he assured her contentedly.

" Oh, you've been working at it in secret. Good."

" Well, not lately. But it only wants another half-dozen chapters or so."

" Hurry up with them then, you tortoise. I haven't even read the masterpiece yet—think of it ! And here I am, wilting away for want of proof that I've married a genius."

He twinkled a fond look at her . . . his wife. " I'm not used to brilliantly overwhelming apparitions like yourself flashing into my sober life.

You've rather taken my breath away. Make allowances for that, Patricia."

"I didn't notice it—at Lynn," she laughed; "*such* a little chatterbox!"

Promptly he exacted penance for her raillery. . . . And the subject of the book was for the moment shelved.

But a few days later she resumed it. She was truly impatient to witness "The Round Adventure" published; to hear the acclamation, critical or enthusiastic, which should be apology for allowing her own talent to lie fallow. Above all, she longed for the sight of his happiness when his fellows should at last hail him as true artist, as One of Them . . . he had confided in her all those dreams of his.

Just at present, the machinery which should produce this sequence of publication and recognition seemed to be unaccountably clogged. A touch from her finger would suffice to set it in motion again. She touched—in fact, sublimely unaware that delicacy was needed, she banged.

"Gareth, call me a shrew and a harridan, but I insist that you should unhand me this very instant, and retire to the library for an evening of diligent inspiration. Your slothful aspect is a great grief to me; it is, truly."

"Adorable, I'm not in the mood to-night."

"Oh dear—enter the artistic temperament! Would it start the mood, do you suppose, if I were to prepare you a cup of cocoa beaten up with white of egg and a drop of rum—or some such invigorating cordial?"

"God forbid! You're an invigorating cordial all by yourself. What I need is a soothing syrup."

"Man—man—and I putting all my soul into an effort to be a Good Wife to you!"

He suggested, with a whimsical glance around the room, that she might put a little of that same soul into an effort to make a bright and cosy home for a fellow returning tired and dispirited from his day's toil. . . .

"Yes?" submissively. "I foresee already that I'm to be heavily lectured. What, may I ask, is wrong with the brightness and cosiness of seventeen Blenheim Terrace?"

He frowned in an attempt to explain what had been dimly perceptible to him from the first: that Patricia lacked that indefinable something which might have given to her surroundings that likewise indefinable something. . . .

"Quite," said Patricia. "He expresses himself with such remarkable coherence and style, that I am moved to rescue him from these flounderings. You had pictured me straying about from room to room, with a song upon my lips; achieving with a deft hand a sort of—of draped charm. Isn't that it? . . . Here and there looping things . . . here and there a flower or two . . . me in a white gown. Have I given speech to your silent longings?"

She had; and so truly that he could not refrain from laughter, though he was slightly annoyed as well.

"Burlesque it or not," he said; "but there *is* such a thing as working one's personality into a

room, till it becomes beautiful. And you know it as well as I, because I felt just this in your own sitting-room at Sydenham. A sort of rhythm and colour which was—you."

"What you felt there, darling, was the je-ne-say-kwah of my mother's housemaid. . . . Personally, I don't care a fig for my inanimate surroundings. They're so subordinate, aren't they? Do they really affect you?"

"When they're wrong, yes. But I've never had them right, so it doesn't much matter."

He smiled at her rather sadly. And with a quick rush of repentance that was still non-comprehending, she vowed to put a daily vase of daffodils upon his writing-table, as is done by the very best type of Novelist's-Wife, if only he would promise to apply himself to the task of becoming illustrious.

Secretly she was not a little astonished at his reluctance to get on with the book. She had anticipated that she would have to restrain him from feverishly over-working. It had meant so much to him. She remembered his account of that awful moment when Pat O'Neill had cut across and cut him out; and the note of despair in his voice: "I was middle-aged, and a failure—and this one idea had come to me—and I could write only this one book. . . ."

Well, and now that all obstacles were cleared away, why didn't he? Why? Why? Patricia, never a very patient person, was suddenly exasperated at the sight of the tall figure placid and inert every evening in an arm-chair before the

dining-room fire. Walking up to him, she seized the journal he held, and flung it into a far corner.

"Damn you, Gareth !—go and write."

She was laughing . . . and was not prepared for the deep intensity of his upward look—fear and pleading commingled. Without a word he rose and went into the library.

He could not write. He knew that beforehand. The atmosphere was too expectant. Patricia was too expectant. Before, when his book had been a secret thing . . . but now he was paralysed by the sense that it *had* to be finished, because something had been sacrificed for it . . . something big . . . that other book, as good as his own, or —better ? "The Round Adventure" was no longer a matter for his own delight, a spontaneous wonder that had been dropped into his brain to do with as he pleased. . . . Was there more implied than mere concern for his advancement, in Patricia's ceaseless urgings that he should idle no longer ? Was there the unspoken reproach : "I gave up my book for you. Mine is wasted. Do you suppose I'll allow it to be wasted for nothing. You owe it to me to make good !"

Yes—of course he must make a start on those last half-dozen chapters. This dallying was absurd ; he had so looked forward to the creation of just this latter portion of Kay Rollinson's round adventure. If he could write before, he could write now. Especially for Patricia's sake.

And again the panic seized him. He could not write—not a line. He dared not write—what phrases would be good enough ? By sacrifice she

had solidified his dream-bubble to such a great important heavy ball; ball of lead . . . all the airy rainbow hues turned to a sulky grey. Such a heavy ball—he could not keep it aloft by his mere breath. Such a heavy responsibility. . . . It was not his book any longer; he had forfeited all right to abandon it if the humour took him thus; Patricia was waiting for him to finish it, and to finish it worthily. There were things she might say, otherwise. . . .

It took him nine weeks of joyless plodding, before he could put into her hands the completed manuscript. It was by no means a new emotion to be working under dread of the suspended lash. He could have wished with it all, that he had loved Patricia a little less. But this temporary clouding of their happiness was not her fault; an accidental blend of circumstances; he absolved her from all blame.

She started the book on the evening he yielded it to her; and read it through at top speed during the whole of the next day while he was not there, that she might not have to sit another evening with his dark pleading eyes fixed steadily upon her face, as she turned page after page. . . . She read with a beating hope that by this would be smothered an uprising suspicion that she had made a mistake; that her last idea had carried her above and beyond reality; that this man before whom she had chosen to sweep all her previous litter of trifles into a supreme consummation of fire, was not quite big enough—the altar not big enough for the offering.

Of course, he was a dear. . . .

Gareth came home late . . . and at dinner performed pretty and intricate little step-dances around the subject of which he most desired to speak. After dinner, in the library, he attempted to resume the step-dance, but Patricia straightway tripped him up.

"I've read it, Gareth."

"Oh?" casually.

She came and sat on the arm of his chair, slipped her arm about his shoulders, leant a soft cheek against his. . . . And he knew she had been disappointed.

"It's unequal; that's the worst that can be said about it. The first half is charming; your style hasn't got a blemish to it—and I'm a judge of style . . . when it isn't my own!" She had made a slip here; she ought not to have referred to her writing; rather more hurriedly she went on: "And I especially love your detail work; all the quaint and whimsical passages; they remind me very much of Richard Pryce—do you know his stuff? The description of the harbour is delicious; and that wood in early spring; and the girl, Sheila. But——"

She paused. And Gareth, neither moving away from her light caress, nor responding to it, said dully: "Yes. Go on."

"But the whole treatment is not quite strong or vital enough to carry the central theme."

Another pause. And then Gareth gave the same stolid assent. "No. I suppose it isn't."

He was waiting for her to remark that the idea

of the central theme had been hers as well as his; and that in her case she had not spoilt it utterly. . . .

"And the last third of the book is—futile!" concluded Pat's clear young voice, without any palliative or mercy.

He sprang upright, pushing her away from him.

"It isn't! It isn't! . . . Or do you think that I overestimated it on purpose, so that you should . . . I suppose you think I talked big about it on purpose?"

She too was on her feet by now, surveying him scornfully.

"Oh, if you had wanted to be treated like a baby, and given sugar-plums only——"

And then suddenly she remembered that just to-night she must be very good to him—because of that doubt in her heart which had been finally and unquestioningly acknowledged as a certainty. Just to-night she must be very pitiful with him . . . she could not quite answer for herself in the future.

"Dear old man, I'm an ignorant brute, and ought to be kicked for my bumptiousness. But I imagined you would rather have heard straight out what I really thought. The first twenty chapters are so first-class that it would have been a miracle if you could have kept it up all through. Honestly and truly, Gareth, I expect it will do tremendously well when it appears."

He put both his hands on her shoulders, smiling rather wryly.

"All right, darling; it's I who deserve the kicking; I'm one of those terrible persons who

wince at candid criticism . . . the reader read, you know. But I'm glad you liked the book."

He submitted it to Messrs. Jernyngham, of the Booke-Shoppe, who refused it with praiseworthy promptitude, and quite sincere regrets that the latter portion of the book had not fulfilled the promise of its opening. They hoped, however, to have an opportunity of seeing more of Mr. Temple's work.

"Send it to Locker and Swyn," advised Patricia, when her husband, with a poor attempt at a laugh, informed her of the rejection.

"Yes, it's more in their line," he agreed.

He thought. "Supposing no publishing-house will accept it, and I shall have to tell her each time it comes back. . . . She will remember how quickly Campbell snapped up hers. Nonsense, she remembers already. How long can the MS. travel round? How many publishers of fiction are there in the United Kingdom? She won't let me give in before it has been sent back by every one. But it's as good as hers, quite as good; this is only my old luck dogging me. Say a hundred and fifty publishers and three and a half weeks at each——"

Locker and Swyn freed him from this sort of arithmetic by accepting "The Round Adventure." They asked him if he could polish up its most conspicuous inequalities; and he replied, albeit grateful to them for the release, that he was incapable of adding or subtracting a single word from the original. And this was not author's arrogance, but a genuine statement of fact. So

they shrugged their shoulders; made him a tolerable contract; and promised to bring the book out in the autumn season. "Say in October, Mr. Temple." He assented. It was now April. Six months to wait before the solid consummation of all his illusions.

There had been sadly little illusion about the actual acceptance of the book. Locker and Swyn themselves were dummies; and the business was run by a very practical manager, John Forrester; who, keen to win the same prestige for "spotting genius" as Leslie Campbell, lacked the little Scotchman's real enthusiasm for first-class stuff and supreme indifference to big sales. It was reported that Forrester's beard had gone hoary from the day that "Piccadilly" went into its thirty-seventh edition. . . . He had been one of the famous Nineteen who had turned down Graham Carr; and like his eighteen sorrowing confrères, could instantly be subdued by airy mention of this instance of his blindness. Alexander was exceedingly assiduous in reminder when chance threw him together with the manager of the rival firm.

Patricia spent the summer in pursuit of as many sports as were possible to one whose headquarters were in St. John's Wood. She was essentially of the type who, given the opportunity, would have made a splendid shot and an excellent horsewoman. As it was, she played golf; learnt to drive a friend's motor; dashed down for several week-ends to the seaside bungalow of another friend, for the sake of the swimming; and when nothing better was forthcoming, took Vercingetorix

for long country tramps. She seemed eager to avoid more thoughtful indoor occupations. Her creed was to soar with an idea, and accept with decent cheerfulness the risk of broken bones. She had, metaphorically, broken a good many bones on her fall from this last star-scamper, which had landed her for good or for evil Gareth Temple's wife. . . . And one might as well walk and swim and drive and golf.

Poor old Gareth—was he brooding too? But his book was accepted; and he still loved her. Whereas her book was waste stuff; and——

Kathleen had foreseen all this. Patricia thought she had penetrated at last with exact apprehension to that lady's point of view. It had puzzled her before that the other should have yielded her claims so easily. But now her motive was stripped bare. "Lord! *I* don't blame her. Sixteen years of it. And no tangible grievance to lay at his door. Just that—that dry-rot in his system. No wonder she wanted me to have a taste of the same Hell!"

Wherein Patricia's judgment fell short of the mark. But then she did not know of the Napier Kirby episode. None of Kathleen's animosity had been for the girl who was a second and more vivid edition of herself; none at all.

"I wonder what has become of her?" mused Patricia, also without any rancour. "Fallen on her feet somehow, certainly. If only Gareth, bless him, didn't look so unutterably miserable at every subject I manage to broach, I'd ask him quite merrily if he corresponds with her."

Gareth did not correspond with Kathleen. He spent his intervals between busy reading for the firm—it was an eruptive season for new authors,—in chafing at the shortcomings of housekeeping in his home; in wondering where Pat could be; in wishing she had not quite such a large and clamorous circle of friends, and would not rush about such a lot, and would attend to him more. Put into words, his own words, there was nothing lacking in the description he inspired, of grey-haired scholarly husband looking indulgently upon his young wife's unconquerable questing spirit. He welcomed her always with his old adoring smile and slow courtliness of manner, when she did eventually return from whatsoever bout of new energy had engaged her. . . . And within five minutes, as she had herself noticed, she would by some quite inconsequent remark contrive to render him unutterably miserable.

For there was so much he dreaded to hear, and which at any moment he might be forced to hear, and to which any haphazard topic might be introduction. For instance: "Gareth, when are you going to set to work at another book?" But that question he fancied he could shelve adroitly when it came, by the reply: "Oh, directly 'The Round Adventure' comes out in the autumn; I want to benefit by what the critics have to say." Temporary reprieve, at all events. Much, much worse than this, would be: "Gareth, I'm going to set to work at another book." . . . And here he was helpless; for after all, though she had voluntarily withdrawn "The Reverse of

the Medal" from the press, because it had trespassed on his chances, that was no guarantee that she never intended to write again. He might have to sit week after week watching her pen tearing its way towards success. That it would be very definite success, his discrimination did not allow him to doubt. She was the very incarnation of triumphant achievement. Which led to the next unspoken possibility: "You know, Gareth," and quite simply this could be said, "my book is better than yours." And: "Queer, isn't it, that our marriage is as much a failure as though—— Well, I mean, it doesn't make much difference in the long run whether one is married or not, does it?"

This was one of the things that Gareth had realized very slowly, and with the painful astonishment of a disappointed child. The actual fact of the ceremony had made no difference whatsoever! It must therefore be something in himself that prevented harmony with either of those different two who had at different times so passionately and inevitably attracted him. Comparing the then and the now, he speculated in a troubled unhappy sort of fashion whether it were really impossible for a pair to dwell together without their peace forever threatened by the one thing unmentionable, the worst of all. One?—a great many things . . . they knocked wearily about in his brain, until, to escape their persistent clangour and jar, he drifted again into the habit of dreams . . . old dreams—wan shadow-dreams —dreams of a girl . . . whose touch was cool.

CHAPTER II

"ARMAGEDDON!" said Gareth several times aloud to himself. "Armageddon. . . ." And then, with a proud upward jerk of the head: "Jellicoe and the Grand Fleet!" After a pause: ". . . 'And the shores of Ireland will be defended by her armed sons, North and South together!'" . . . He broke off, once more to rumble, with a curious slow relish: "Armageddon."

For he was not yet muted to the thrill of this thing that the summer of nineteen-fourteen had brought along with it; and which had made of him a nervous responsive instrument for all the unwonted word-fragments swarming about haphazard, as men fumbled to express the new conditions, to find a language significant of their new emotions:

"The making of history—the war that will end war—violation of neutral territory—the Allied Armies—crush the menace of Prussianism—mobilization—transport—commissariat—Press Bureau—moratorium——"

So quickly they poured in, these coins of the new mintage, that Gareth had scarcely time to let his fancy handle them lovingly:

"The mad dog of Europe—defence of the Realm—wait till the Cossacks get to Berlin" savouring

the ominous implication: "Kitchener wants five hundred thousand men——"

"Casualty list. . . ."

There was a different note to the saying of that; a curt rather harsh inflection, where in other cases one might slide the syllables lingeringly. But—"Casualty list"—No, one was dry and business-like over that.

"Efficiency!" muttered Gareth in the same tone.

A newspaper boy scampered past him in the hot stale sunshine, creaking: "Off-i-shul! six-thirty off-i-shul! 'Eavy fighting at . . ." the name was blurred. "Off-i-shul!"

Official! . . . Of course one had heard it at the time of the Boer War; a little while after he and Kathleen—— He remembered bringing her home the evening papers, and her fierce incisive comments upon the situation. Well—now he brought the late editions home to Patricia. The strain between them of the things unmentionable had been blown to bits by the eruption of the war; now there was always news, real news, off-i-shul news, for their discussion; general discussion, which as yet had not dwindled to the personal question.

He glanced at the stop-press column. No longer any doubt about it: Paris was saved. The German hordes had been rolled back at the eleventh hour. Gareth swung down the Strand, with the Marseillaise crashing exultantly through his brain, temporarily displacing his other orchestral selection of phrases. The French, as a nation, appealed

to him tremendously; and he was glad we were concerned, in howsoever a minor degree, with the salvation of the City of Light. His eye caught a glimpse of a portrait of the Belgian King in the window of a picture-shop; the handsome, fair, somewhat stolid face had lately become familiar as the hitherto unknown strains of Belgium's anthem; his ear was arrested by a passerby exclaiming excitedly: "Why did the Russian steam-roller——" the rest was lost in a surge of human traffic outside the recruiting-office. "Why did the steam-roller?" Gareth asked himself absurdly; and went on with the question for quite a long time before he realized that there was no prescribed answer to it.

A detachment of bluejackets marched past, their red faces grinning cheerfully . . . one globular patch of red after another, with a curious rhythmical effect of repetition.

A patriotic shopkeeper had decorated his frontage with the intertwined flags of the Allies . . . "Intertwined. . . ."

". . . And the shores of Ireland will be defended by her armed sons, North and South together!"

Perhaps more than by anything else, had Gareth's impressions of this first month of war been dented by the peroration of Redmond's third of August speech in the House of Commons. And the sequence of great and small events served but to heighten this prevalent effect of cohesion, of all stray units gathered up and knit together for a joint purpose: North and South Ireland; Great

Britain and her colonies; the regular army with the raw recruits; the suffragette with the spoilt débutante; Liberal and Conservative and Labour; France and Russia and Servia and Belgium, rhapsody of concentration on one issue, one ideal . . . no single person left out who wanted to be in. . . . Here was the old dream which for Gareth had previously been symbolized in the absorbed fraternity of "Campbell's Young Men," repeated now on an immeasurably larger scale. One of Them. The glamour of belonging.

Gareth had always been slightly appalled by the burden of each individual responsible for himself; and his visions had naturally taken the trend of mankind serving in a common cause; one need for the scattered energies; one will pushing these along. The world as a sort of club, excluding a few just to strengthen the privilege of membership. In this case it was the Germans who had wantonly put themselves outside the Crusade for Humanity. . . . *Somebody* has to be the enemy . . . he recollected childhood's difficulty of finding the offensive party in the game of French-and-English——

"I suppose that game will have to go now; and the Berlin polka; and German measles; and Prussian binding; and—and Dresden china—and music—and eau de Cologne—and the dachshund——" he pondered over possible additions to this list of articles that were of obstreperously enemy manufacture.

. . . The Strand and London and the British Isles —crowded with little people, who in a crisis had

proved big enough to be lifted above their petty domestic squabbles, and belligerent beat-your-neighbour-out-of-doors attitude. And he was one of them—One of Them. . . . More recruits going by, in attire a grotesque mixture of civilian and khaki. Here, there, and wherever one looked, evidences of some personal sacrifice.—That was at once the clarion-call and the march-rhythm of nineteen-fourteen. To participate, to fall in step, one must sacrifice as well. . . .

Suddenly he was conscious of a keen desire once more to live in complete harmony with Patricia. After all, what stood between them but the fact of her book suppressed that his might appear? Viewed in the clearer colder searchlight which recent events had streamed into his flinching soul, it seemed infinitely mean and selfish that he should smugly have acquiesced in this arrangement.

For Pat's was the worthier book of the two. He admitted it now. He would admit it presently to her. It was splendidly generous that she should have aided him in dissembling the fact. But if Gareth Temple were to be identified with the Crusade—and he did not mean to be left out this time—he could straightway make a beginning by stripping himself of the illusion that had hitherto been so pampered—illusion that his book was in the very slightest degree important to anyone but himself. Patricia's should be published instead of his; or—since it was indeed too late except at an enormous expense to withdraw a novel of which he had already received the page-proofs—Patricia's should be published as well as his—and kill it.

Locker and Swyn could well afford a failure.

Gareth hurried home, flushed and exalted by this definite solution of a vague desire; and not at all abashed by the thought that Pat had already once anticipated him, by use of their accidentally overlapping themes, to give herself a spiritual adventure. It stimulated satisfaction in him to remember that it was no valueless contribution he intended to make to the prevailing Fund for Remorseful Egoists. For the first fortnight or so following the outbreak of hostilities, it had seemed doubtful if literature and art were not doomed to be carried away in a waste-paper basket, emptied irrespective of contents. But since the news from the Front had been more hopeful, intellect and civilization had begun to collect themselves; metaphorically, to look round and discover how much of themselves remained after the shock. And John Forrester had only yesterday written to announce that, barring unforeseen complications, they intended to adhere to their original resolution to publish "The Round Adventure" in October. So that by this genuine offering of what was immediately precious, Gareth would not only be subordinating himself fitly to the exactions of a great impersonal Cause; but would also be witness of Patricia's impulsive tumult of gratitude and happiness. Henceforth would exist no reason, no reason at all, why their life together might not be all he had ever pictured it. . . . He sprang off the step of the omnibus, and walked rapidly up the road to number seventeen.

"Pat! Pat! Where are you?"—impatience was eager to act red-hot upon resolve. "Pat!"

"Here!" her voice came distantly from the very top of the house.

"In the box-room? Why?" He vaulted up the two flights of stairs; and then up another steep little flight.

Patricia was rummaging among a disorderly chaos of trunks and sacks and broken packing-cases that had disgorged half their contents over the bare uneven floor: picture-frames; torn books; a pair of ski; the spring-mattress of a bed . . . general litter of tools . . . remnants of fancy-dress, and old boots, and brown-paper, and a battered bird-cage . . . he wondered how all these inconsequent articles had managed to accumulate during their seven months of marriage?—he could not recall that they had ever had a bird. . . . Then speculation was split asunder by lightning memory of his errand:

"Pat," breathless from mingled excitement and his quick passage up the stairs, "Pat—I want your book to be published as well as mine; or instead of mine. Yours is the better book. I've made up my mind——"

"*Books?*"—she looked up from her squatting position in front of an old belabelled portmanteau; her arms still plunged elbow-deep in search of some article. "Heavens above, my good man, who cares about books now!"

. . . "They've stopped mattering," she added, an instant later, with less of vehement scorn in her

voice, seeing his expression of slapped bewilderment.

He sat down on a dusty roll of carpet. It was not much good explaining to her how his apparently irrelevant decision was indeed closely linked up with the war . . . a sort of readjustment of soul and spring-cleaning of motive which in its ultimate working-out would at least infinitesimally contribute towards his dreaming conception of a nation massed to loftier aim than before August the fourth. He had trusted to Patricia's understanding of this, since like impulses of her own had always resolved themselves quickly into deed. But Pat, with strangely shallow interpretation, said that books did not matter. . . . He was six weeks too late to impress her by open admission of his literary inferiority. Another failure—— Why could he never once succeed in pulling off anything with full staging and effects ?

Dejectedly he asked : " What are you looking for ? "

" My big waterproof boots. They ought to be here somewhere. I've found everything else——" She came to an abrupt halt, tugging a sturdy strap from the depths of the portmanteau. " Good ; that'll come in useful. I'm off to Belgium on Thursday."

" What ? " He was on his feet in a moment.

" With Hume Ferguson's Ambulance Corps."

" But—but you're not a nurse."

" No. . . . My official capacities will be treasurer, secretary, courier, and emergency chauffeur. But between ourselves, the idea is that I should write

up incidents of our daily round; and knock them into a book of which the enormous profits shall be devoted to the purchase of more ambulances. We've an awfully scratch lot at present."

"Just now you said books didn't matter."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I should have said fiction didn't matter. Campbell thinks that a volume of impressions jotted down on the spot ought to go well, before the market is choked up with them."

"Campbell—— ?"

"Yes. He was up at Ferguson's the other day; and he made a fairly generous advance offer."

Gareth sat down again, his hands propping his head, while his mind swam with dim pellucid shapes . . . hardly as yet apprehended. Sick disappointment at his sacrifice so lightly spurned. . . . Sick fear that Patricia was going into danger, and that he would not be there to protect her. . . . Sick envy of the ease with which she had found a way into the very centre of action—ungetatable centre where he so longed to be. . . . But it was all wrong: she was a woman and he a man. In the Quest for the Grail, in the Crusades for Jerusalem, it was the knight who strode forth with mighty effect and clangour, the maiden who sat at home musing over his shield. . . .

So her intention was indeed to write again! . . . Already to have arranged matters with Campbell—*his* chief; *his* firm—and he only to hear now, and how casually, of the step taken! . . . Things would never be right again between them—never! never! Although they were married; although

he was the husband ;—still that inversion of leadership. And after the war she would be able to say she had been in the thick of it ; she would be One of Them. . . . The old horror re-threatening him.

Supposing she did not come back. The Prussians did queer things in Belgium ; queer and ugly things to women—to Pat, who was beautiful and fearless . . . *his wife.* Oh, he was proud of her ; but he wished she had been confronted with sufficient difficulties that her desire, her excellent and gallant desire to achieve her share in the war, might have remained stuck fast in a bag of non-accomplishment. He would not have had it otherwise than that she should wish to participate.

Above all and again . . . it was not quite fair. He had been touched to such an exalted mood during his walk down the Strand ; exalted, yet humble ; eager to renounce ; sensitive to appreciate each subtle evidence of a nation quickened at last to nobility. The sort of mood one must really cherish. And then Pat had thoroughly upset him.

He endeavoured to recapture something of that transparent sunlit feeling, before it all filtered away. . . .

" Listen, darling——"

" Yes ? " She twisted round ; and resting both her elbows upon his knees, gave him a sudden and disconcerting measure of her attention. Almost he was aware of his soul blinking nervously in a full flood of golden light.

" I'm glad you feel that you want to give your-

self up to the war, Pat. Every man and every woman and every child in the kingdom ought to be feeling the same. No matter if war is right or wrong; no matter if this is the war that ends war, or else another of those beastly life-spilling limb-lopping campaigns that signify nothing in the end—still, any great upheaval is welcome when it means all eyes to the right-about, all eyes fixed steadily upon the same vision—instead of glancing askew; the shutting-down of obstinate lids; short sight pitted unfairly against long sight; sight that even in peace-time was bloodshot and distorted.—Oh, those little squinters at some little personal advantage to be gained——"

"Gareth, if everyone stopped to say all that before they got to work, it would waste a lot of the national energy, wouldn't it?"

He was silent, bitterly offended.

"I wasn't proposing to pour out my sentiments about the war at the street-corners," he remarked at last. "But in a man's own home——"

She kissed him. "I was rude. I'm sorry. But frankly—there isn't much time nowadays for 'sentiments about the war.'"

Gareth said simply: "I want to help as well. Both of us, Pat. That's what I was trying to say."

"Good! Loud and enthusiastic applause. There's a mighty lot to be done. Not for the old honour-and-glory business. This is just an overwhelming shake-up and shake-together; and . . . I'd hate to feel we didn't stand shoulder-to-shoulder over the war, Gareth."

"We do, dear. Only you put it in five words where I use five hundred. An overwhelming shake-up and shake-together!"

They were both erect; each looking at the other with a tremulous half-fearful stir of hope that there was yet salvage to be effected among the shipwreck of their joint adventure. Patricia, nimbler to reverse emotions than the man, was silently administering harsh rebuke to her own arbitrary judgment, that had allowed faith in his innate fineness to lapse into intolerance. Perhaps after all there was that in him—her divine failure—which would justify all her one-time beliefs. She had let instinct be misled by his little irritating surface faults. . . .

Well—neither time nor place for private adjustments and reconciliations, while the Germans were barely turned back from the walls of Paris. She had little patience with those people who used the war, instead of being used by it. When the crisis was over . . . then maybe she and Gareth, comparing their tiny shares in what was past, might thus discover a generous new comradeship in mutual respect. Or even the old glamour might break again, like luminous sunset between black stripes of cloud. Meanwhile, she would leave it to Gareth's awakened understanding, that for now silence between them was enough. . . .

"There's a mighty lot to be done," she repeated in her most matter-of-fact tones; "you might make a creditable start by finding my waterproof boots."

"Pat—don't go to the Front on Thursday.

Please don't. Let's do something together for the war."

"What?"

"Something. . . ."

"Rather silly for me to give up a definite job, for the sake of something——"

"For the sake of doing it together."

"Je n'en vois pas la nécessité." She turned away from him, and with quick restless movements began to throw back the scattered articles into the portmanteau.

He affected not to notice the growing coldness in her replies. "Take me with you in the Ambulance Corps."

"You're neither soldier, doctor, nor mechanic."

"Neither are you."

"I happen to be fitted to a job. There are plenty that will fit you, without butting into the wrong place."

"I wanted us to work together," he reiterated stubbornly.

"Why encumber our separate usefulness by insisting on our private preference to be useful hand-in-hand?"

"If it *were* your private preference—it isn't! You're glad to be dashing off without me."

"I'm glad of this chance to go with the Corps!" Patricia sprang upright, and flung up her arms behind her head. . . . He could not refrain from the thought of how triumphantly nature had equipped her for any strenuous job she might care to undertake; how little likely that she would bungle it; how untiring her limbs; how swift to

any adjustment the poised equilibrium of her mind. Nor would any hitch occur in the plans of Ferguson's Ambulance Corps, robbing her of the forthcoming rampant opportunities to—to show off. No hitch—where Pat was concerned. It was fate. She would go. And she would excel.

"You might have waited for me before you settled anything;" he spoke plaintively as a child who sees another child off to a party. "I suppose you think I'm not in earnest when I tell you I want to help. I've thought of nothing else."

"Your meditations do you credit, my lad."

"Is that meant for a taunt?" He flushed hotly. "I'd have enlisted, but I'm over age."

"I know."

"Well——"

She was making havoc in a trunk at the far end of the room now, half hidden by an enormous old arm-chair on three legs. . . . "Most people seem to have tumbled into some sort of war-job by now, that's all."

Patricia was deliberately behaving like a brute. His futile efforts to engage her promise that they should "do something together," had deadened her to a cold fury, all the chillier for her previous glow of reaction. For she perceived clearly, could not help perceiving, that his actual motive in thus pleading for combined effort was less affection for her than sudden panic of his inability to find himself a place anywhere on the crowded slow-turning machine. He hoped that her initiative might serve for two. And to this end, for the shielding of his own self-respect, he would have prevented

accomplishment of her apportioned labours. Pat was not setting forth in any subjective mood of vainglory. Things had to be done, and the ego who did them mattered not at all save in efficiency. But Gareth Temple was totally incapable of submerging his morbid sense of Gareth Temple. . . . She determined that this time at least he should expose himself—if only to prevent all future errors of illusion on her part.

And nothing that she could have said would have increased to such an extent the terror to which he was naturally prone, as her last remark. Other people—other people's books—other people's wars——

Was he again to be the one left out ?

A rapid mental survey among his friends ; thence to casual acquaintances. . . . He could not find a single companion for his isolation. Guy Burnett had obtained his commission in the London Scottish ; Alexander, surprisingly, had enlisted in the ranks ; Ran Wyman was war correspondent in Russia ; Graham Carr had departed on a secret service commission ; Leslie Campbell neglected publishing, for an important post connected with the Commissariat, for which he had revealed an unexpected fund of expert knowledge. Jim Collins was head of a branch of motor transport ; and Lulu did canteen work with the Y.M.C.A. ; and Mr. Golding, from next door, was a Special Constable, and dug trenches in Hyde Park on Sundays. Fred Worley went every night to Victoria or Charing Cross to fetch the wounded ; while Trixie sat all day long romantically in the

Tower, mending soldiers' socks. And Mrs. O'Neill and Anne organized sewing and knitting classes in great multitude. Everybody busy; everybody rushing about with portentous faces, and bits of uniform—letters or buttons or badges—stuck about them to signify they were a certified part of the new-erected slow-grinding hardly tested machinery of war. Yes . . . and via Collins he had learnt of Napier Kirby among the first to pass brilliantly the examination for the Royal Flying Corps; of Grace, training to be a nurse; of Bobby, a strenuous member of the Motor-Cycle Cadets. From Jim, too, had come news of Kathleen as superintendent in a large munition factory. . . .

While he had been obsessed with misty and beautiful visions of a people linked by a common stress and a common sorrow to finding place in a common cause. . . . *How* did one find place? How had all these cogs slipped into movement? Gareth wished passionately that he had been of military age, that he might have enlisted, and been quit of the necessity for initiative. And even then enlistment was voluntary. What his temperament demanded was to be hauled into action, with no other option but to submit. He was lost and confused amid this pell-mell scurry, this upset of tradition and habit and circumstance. . . . If he could have begun when the others began, to perceive exactly by what process of single steps they separately attained to their goal; as far as possible to imitate them, to get carried on with the impetus of the rush. . . . He was resentful now at being

confronted by the necessity of making his own rush.

Above all, resentful of Patricia. She stood as epitome of the entire faction of persons who had so annoyed him by obtaining before himself an assured position in the scheme of war. She, at least, might not have confronted him with the climax of insult. She was his wife . . . a traitor in the very camp. "I'm off to Belgium on Thursday." The easy announcement had mocked his impotence. She had meant it in mockery. . . .

"I don't know that I'm so keen on doing war-work, if we're not to do it together," he said; and he said it hating this evil humour she had thrust upon him; recurrent humour that when it came clung with leech-like obduracy on to his ashamed consciousness; spirit of idiotic perversity which caused him to represent himself in such a false light, to say such foolish untrue things. This mood that stuck and stuck——

"The German menace seems to present itself to you as a merry little dinner-party, to which we get our invitations in pairs!" Pat flicked at him.

"It's you, not I, who are scrambling for a seat. I shall look round quietly to see where I can be useful. . . ."

"And in what direction did you think of exercising your talents?"—Yes, he should be made to own his loose helpless incompetence, even if it were . . . a disgusting exhibition. For wavering before her mental vision was a bald newspaper announcement of five weeks ago:—Captain Dacres Upton—Died of Wounds. And now the pity of it

smote her, as it had not done at the time. . . . Died of wounds—God! why did that sound in print as though it had been so terribly slow. . . . Within a week of the outbreak of war he had already been on the soil of Flanders; below it, within little more than a week. And Gareth had at last to meet with the inevitable comparison. He threw up a shield of desperate bravado:

"I don't see that I need confide my intentions to you. You told me nothing beforehand of this ambulance business of yours."

"But what do you mean to do, Gareth? Tell me. Say you start 'looking round quietly' to-morrow . . . where will you go? To whom will you apply? I'm interested in the process."

She had thrown away all pretence, and was openly goading him. . . . He recognized the tone and the attitude—as he recognized the answering sullen lethargy they awakened in himself. In these dual positions he and Kathleen had hated one another during sixteen years. And from Kathleen he had rebounded to this younger and yet more vital Kathleen. He recognized her at last; and at the same hour as her final wrenching asunder of the man he was from the man he thought himself.

And Patricia realized suddenly that it was just as well she should be going away from him, and going at once. For she had found that in him which she could not forbear from tormenting . . . again and again she would be forcing him to lay bare that stupid helpless twitching little nerve . . . she knew now exactly where it cowered, beneath

the deceptive layers of quiet strength and picturesque sadness . . . and it tempted a certain cruelty foreign to her nature. . . . It was just as well she should be going away.

He sat hunched on the packing-case, head moodily supported between his hands. Over in the far corner, in noisy challenging fashion, she emptied the tin trunk of its contents. . . .

CHAPTER III

"THE Round Adventure" was published in mid-October.

It sold seven hundred and thirty-two copies, counting the colonial sales. A few reviews, closely packed between brimming columns of war-tidings, mentioned the book in terms of "promising" "whimsical charm" "pleasant fantasy"; others dismissed it as "inadequate"; one critic remarked caustically that "Kay Rollinson" might with profit have been sent for awhile to the front-line trenches. . . . "In these times, when men are not afraid to face death every minute from every quarter of earth and air and water, we have small patience with these morbid self-analytic heroes beloved of the lady novelist. Gareth Temple—of whom, despite the masculine pseudonym, one strongly suspects the sex—must learn that there are many different names for 'funk'; but nowadays, only one cure for it."

Mr. Campbell congratulated Gareth, absently, on the appearance of the novel; said he would read it—and forgot. One elderly lady in Somerset wrote to the author, saying what a beautiful and helpful message the story had held for her. Locker and Swyn were not encouraged to do more than advertise "The Round Adventure" inconspicu-

ously for a month; and then resigned themselves to the comparatively slight financial loss. Unlike Campbell, however, who in all cases would rather exploit himself as a good publisher than prove his client a bad author, Forrester was careful to inform Mr. Temple that they were depressed over the sales.

And there was no perceptible increase of respect in Jimmy's manners.

As Patricia had remarked, these were times of war, and books had temporarily ceased to matter.

So many dreams . . . so much of exultation, of strife and heart-sickness and envy, of sacrifice, and of rebounding hope . . . all of life's issues since a year and a half hooked on to the single obsession of a book written and a book published.

And—"Is this *all?*" Gareth could not bring himself to believe that this was indeed all.

"I shall never dream again. . . ."

He was resentful of this over-toppling unheeding weight that had fallen athwart his frail creation, and crushed it, and crushed it out of sight and out of existence. The more resentful, since all about him were real sufferings, real flesh-and-blood losses; pain and suspense; and in comparison, the failure of his book counted for much neither in his own sight nor in anyone else's. One could not even feel noble about it; merely . . . tepid.

He was not employed upon war-work. There was still sufficient to occupy him as reader to Leslie Campbell. Books about Germany were

being published by the score; exposing German militarism and German ethics; reminiscences of English governesses who had resided in Germany; translations from the German writers. . . . People were curious to understand this apparently civilized scientific philosophic folk who had so startlingly revealed themselves savage and of insensitive honour.

Plenty for Gareth to do. Sometimes he almost succeeded in deluding himself that this was indeed war-work, or meritoriously akin to it. The first rush to active service was over; had crashed over his protesting tenacity like a wave, leaving him still as a limpet adherent to the rock. He also discovered, to his relief, that there were other limpets on the rock. He did not much like the look of them . . . but who was he to complain? Now that the roar and foam and sputter of the wave had died down, the limpet no longer felt seriously uncomfortable. . . .

It would have required a very strong reminder of external circumstances to reanimate Gareth's once flaming visions of all mankind bonded to unity. One could not run about clamorously in an atmosphere already adapted, still, settled, to the new conditions. If he had begun earlier——

Gareth remained where he was.

In the spring of nineteen-fifteen he had the pleasure of assisting in the publication of Pat O'Neill's volume of vivid impressionistic jottings—"The Log-Book"—actual experience, veined by brilliant humour or fiery pity. Published at half a crown, it sold over twenty thousand copies, of

which Ferguson's Ambulance Corps reaped the entire benefit. Patricia did not even return to England to savour her success. ". . . I'm only the gramophone needle," she scribbled to Gareth; " without me these incidents would not be recorded on the wax; but I've created nothing! "—This in answer to the letter of congratulation which he had written at the prompting of one of his best and sweetest impulses; a letter which was generous and sincere, and altogether charming.

It was another whole year before she eventually permitted herself a short holiday in England. She was doing strenuous and useful work with the Corps, and could very hardly be spared from any of her capacities, to which time and emergency had added nursing and first-aid surgery. A second volume of " The Log-Book " had recently been published, and was already humming through its ninth edition . . . Leslie Campbell forgave that little matter of " The Reverse of the Medal " withdrawn; he was very pleased with Pat O'Neill. So were Campbell's Young Men—such of the band whose various leaves happened now, for the first time since the outbreak of the war, to coincide. Vincent Alexander had been killed at the Dardanelles; and young Burnett had lost a leg in the same sorrowful expedition; Graham Carr was in London, convalescent from a light attack of typhoid; Ran Wyman, on the other hand, was suffering from nothing worse than a startled discovery of that especial form of Deity that is born and bred solely in Russia, and whose divine simplicity is badly damaged by import into England.

In and out of the office, as in pre-war days; the same arrogance of freemasonry; the same disregard of persons outside the temporarily predominating subject; the same eager brilliant discussions, confident laying down of the law, flippant esoteric allusions; rather more of manliness and common sense, perhaps, and less of windy theory.

And the reader sat at his desk and listened, with the same wistful sense of being entirely superfluous. It did not add any strangeness to the scene that Pat should now be One of Them. She merely occupied the vacant space into which he had always dreamt his own person; and seemed quite at home in it. He had seen practically nothing of his wife during her week's nominal stay at Blenheim Terrace. She was claimed incessantly, and seemed to enjoy the whirlwind holiday; though the old contradiction was visible again between sad dead eyes and mocking up-curve of the lips. . . . Patricia had received the stamp of war.

"Until your advent, I was the only feminine element in these sacred offices," said Mona Gurney, whom Graham Carr had just introduced.

The latter put in: "And even now we only accept her ladylike little person for the sake of her books' sturdy uncompromising masculinity. Candidly, Pat, did you expect anything like this to be the author of 'Rust on the Plough'?"

Mona Gurney's fists flew up to her huddled shoulders, with a funny little gesture of anger all her own: "Graham, you ask everybody that.—It's *silly* to expect me to wear straws in my hair

and yellow clay on my boots, just because I get good reviews in the 'Agricultural Monthly.'" She turned a small pleading face towards Patricia: "Mr. Campbell is quite as bad. For weeks he couldn't make head or tail of me; then he had an inspiration: invited me to spend a day in the country, led me into a field . . . and waited for me to get excited. When I didn't cast myself headlong on the earth and bite it, he was disappointed, and took me back to town."

"If I were to make head or tail of you," Pat exclaimed laughing, "it should be a fuzzy furry grey tail that was cocked upright . . . and between your wee paws I should just love to pop a nut! I'm delighted to meet you, Miss Gurney; and since Graham has started us on odious personalities, let me confess that never in my life have I encountered anyone quite so fascinatingly like a squirrel!"

Mona's hands flew up again, accompanying a laugh that was midway between a squeak and a gurgle: "Oh dear!—and Alex always used to call me a Puritan."

"A Puritan squirrel expresses it exactly." But a lull fell upon conversation at the mention of Vincent Alexander. He had been popular among these of his friends who had pierced beneath his extreme outward decorum.

The lull was broken by whir of the telephone bell.

"Let me answer it!" Guy Burnett exclaimed, who had that instant hobbled in with Ran Wyman. "It will be like a taste of old times." For he was

still in his blue hospital suit ; and far too weak and white to think just yet of returning to the firm ; though rumour whispered that presently his father intended to buy him a partnership with Leslie Campbell. . . . " Hello ! Hello ! . . . Come back, you blighter—what d'you want to run away for ? . . . Hello-o-o-o ! . . . Carr, there was a time when I could have betted on this being an order for ' Piccadilly.' "

" Yer can bet yer shirt it's fur the ' Log-Book ' now," put in the Heartbreaker, raising a damp crimson face from his parcel-packing, and speaking in tones that were husky with pride and passion. " It's that bloomin' ' Log-Book ' 'ere all day long, till we're fair fed up with it. Really we are, Miss O'Neill."

". . . Hello ! . . . Yes — yes. . . . All right. By to-morrow ?—certainly, nothing easier. . . . Hi ! no ! wait a minute. . . ." Burnett turned to Campbell who had thrust a head round the door of his sanctum. " 'Evening, sir—I say, I'm not up-to-date any more in these matters. Hale's are asking if the hundred copies of ' The Log-Book ' are ready for 'em yet, according to promise ? "

" Nay, we can't get the edeetions through at that pace. Enquire if they happen to ken there's a European War in prawgress ! " with terrific scorn.

Burnett did so ; and then with a cordial " good-bye," replaced the receiver.

" It's really rather a miracle to find any sort of book-interest surviving after two years of topsy-turvydom," Ran Wyman commented, from the

table on to which he had swung himself beside Pat. "We're a marvellous nation; I expected a landslide in literature; and here we are, flourishing!"

"Publishing is awnly being carried on under enormous deefficulties," Campbell announced cheerfully; "dearth of paper—dearth of labour—dearth of railway faceelities—dearth of reviews—dearth of the public's money——"

"Dearth of everything except authors. Behold us in rich quantities, gladdening to the eye. And surely no dearth of material, either; consider with what an infinitely fresh store of possibilities the war has equipped our jaded brains."

"Yus—Ran thinks I left a leg at Suvla Bay, so that he should write eight hundred pages on the theme of 'God's in his Russia, all's right with the——'"

"Shut up!" Wyman's narrow black eyes were wet, and he blinked them rapidly. Confronted with the boy's crippled condition, he was absurdly ashamed of the luck which had carried him unscathed through eighteen months of impudent exposure to all hazards.

Graham Carr put the general question as to whether they considered it legitimate to use the war for purposes of fiction?

"What's your objection, Carr?"

"Life-and-death is a bigger thing than pen-and-ink."

"Dinna say that, laddie. In some cases, pen and ink has sur-r-rvived life and death."

"One in every thousand. The nine hundred and ninety nine are merely . . . impertinent."

Patricia murmured reminiscently: "'. . . And when he came back to her, he wore on his breast a little piece of metal inscribed: For Valour. . . . He had made good, after all!'"

"That's the stuff. The editor of the 'Blue Sky' told me that in the first month of the war he received uncountable short stories in the line of 'Was He A Coward?' 'Coward V.C.' 'The Girl who Chucked up the Man who Funked for his Brother who Didn't' . . . and so on. It's all very well in peace-time to pander to a certain maudlin moral hysteria in the reading public. But the war's real enough and raw enough—and ought to be immune from cheap serial exploitation." Carr spoke with the authority of one who since the fourth of August, 1914, had not once been betrayed into print.

"But the kind of penny serial stuff you mention is not real," Patricia argued; "it's about a quite pretty little war—a war in muslin with a light blue sash—the sort of war one could invite to tea with one's children and know it would not set a bad example. Far enough removed from the actual thing, to make it harmless. It's the sort of war in which the heroine is always a Red Cross Nurse without any previous training; with an adjustable face that can remind each and every wounded officer in the ward of his girl at home. . . . Did any of you ever stumble across that priceless gem: 'In spite of his lameness, he embraced her passionately!'?"

"That's the rank and file of war fiction," Carr said; "the next grade annoys me more, because

it ought to know better: The pre-war psychological problem presented, with the war conveniently lugged in towards the end, as *deus ex*, to solve all difficulties, cut all strains, adjust all quarrels. Then, for want of definite conclusion, the Woman watches the Man (not the hero and heroine in this grade) depart for the Front, with a queer uplifted premonition in her heart that he will come safely through the Supreme Test—just he, *ausgesucht*—as we say in the dead languages."

Campbell cried indignantly: "Ye're unjust, Carr. This is truth ye were quoting. For in every single case all over the world, wasn't the war just bound to tumble unexpectedly into some seetuation or other, and decslocate it?" Pat and Gareth exchanged a quick look; while Campbell went on: "It's far more unnatural to work oot the problem to its logical conclusion of what would have happened if the war hadn't happened."

"It just depends if you look upon the war as the sum total of what each individual's acts and feelings went to make it, and are still making it; or as a complete descent from the Absolute, regardless of atomic contribution?"

"Monism or pluralism—what does it matter?" cried Pat, impatient as usual with unprofitable theorizing. "The answer makes no practical difference either in the conduct or the result of the war."

Carr immediately accused her of pragmatism.

"The war has killed 'isms,'" declared Ran Wyman. To which Carr replied curtly: "Till the day when the 'isms' shall kill war."

"All the same, the sort of modern novel that tries

to ignore the war, smells fusty—like a station cab. I've read a few : the author makes no allusion at all to the fact of the war; but at the same time his characters are rather inexplicably inclined to cold-shoulder Germany; almost to cut it dead . . . instinctive second-sight, I suppose. General impression of: 'I know something about you, Mr. Germany, but I won't tell, 'cos this isn't a war novel!'—intensely irritating. Also an occasional careless remark on the lines of: 'Yes, I want my son to learn how to box a compass—it may be of use to him in the far-off eventuality of European war, which I somehow think is not so far off as it seems now!'—Clever fellow!"

"And even granted," said Pat, "that the best authors—top-grade—wait for a focussed perspective of all this scurrying muddle——"

Unceremoniously Guy Burnett interrupted her:

"Why should they? It's just this scurrying muddle, as you call it, that ought to be chronicled by any writer whose brain is sufficiently nimble to catch it. We can trust to historians for the eventual consistent balancing and summing-up; but just the slippery, shifting, sliding kaleidoscope of the war, as filtered through this personality and that——"

"Let me point out, Guy, that you can't filter a kaleidoscope . . . at any rate, not in the presence of Leslie Campbell. We owe something still to the prestige of the firm."

"Nobody wants an impersonal and godlike summary of the Great War as yet. *That* would be impertinent, if you like!"

Patricia said lightly: "I beg of you not to apologize; I began a sentence about ten minutes ago; it's not of the faintest interest to anyone save myself—but allowing that, I'd like to finish it."

Burnett apologized profusely; and the company hushed their tongues, and gazed with admiring expectancy upon Pat O'Neill.

"Take it for granted that a professional writer feels like Mr. Graham Carr on the impertinence of nibbling at such a giant subject; take it also that the said writer is anxious to satisfy the public's yearnful plea for distraction from the one topic;—does Mr. Graham Carr realize the petty difficulties that beset such a writer from the outset? A novel that does not deal with the war, must presumably not be laid in times of war; because the war, if once mentioned, inevitably occupies the foreground—as it has in all our lives. Therefore the writer, even if he or she wishes to be up-to-date, must break the tale off sharply at the end of June, nineteen-fourteen. And if the characters are to spread themselves and grow old, he must either let them disport themselves in a wholly problematic after-the-war period—in which God help the prophetic instinct!—or else reckon all his dates and everybody's ages backwards from the last chapter, so as to be correct in a false assumption that modern times ended two years ago . . . which mathematical callisthenics will probably land him in a bag of anachronisms——"

"Heavens, child! it's not at all necessary to do all that; there are surely millions of old books to

satisfy that section of the reading public who require distraction from the war."

"Then if WE—the literary fraternity—are neither to express ourselves on the subject of the war, nor on the subject of otherwise, with what do you suggest our busy pens shall be occupied?"

"With nothing, for the duration of the war. Let 'em rust. Nobody will miss 'em; and there's plenty of emergency work to be done. I can safely make this statement, as none of us present are squandering our energies on irrelevant fiction."

Mona Gurney broke down, and shed tears.

"My darling! my precious!" Wyman leapt to her side, and attempted ineffectually to console her. "What is it? What has the nasty man said to upset you? Don't you believe a word of it——"

"It's such a beautiful book!" she sobbed. "And I thought I was keeping the lamp of civilization trimmed and burning—I did, truly. . . . I said so every time I sat down at my desk. It's two hundred and twenty thousand words, and only five more chapters to write——"

"Two hundred and twenty thousand wur-r-rds, and not finished yet!" Campbell was aghast. "But what may be the theme of this—this paper-eating monstrosity, my dear?"

Mona broke away from Ran's cherishing arms, and sat up on her haunches with spasmodic fidelity to Patricia's simile of a wee furry creature about to beg: "Oh, it is, it *is* a lovely book!" screwing up her eyes and mouth in an ecstasy of remembrance. "It's all about the Wars of the Roses!"

A shout of laughter greeted the announcement.

"But what's wrong with *this* war, Mona?—what's wrong with it? Why be prehistoric?—drag up these far-fetched relics from the ruins of time, when the genuine article is in the next room, so to speak?"

"Because it's in *this* room—and a little too genuine," Mona explained. "I do agree with Graham in wanting to let the pudding get cold before I dig in my spoon—but I can't write quite inconsequent novels on heredity or *la femme incomprise*, either—just at present. And I can't put out the lamp altogether, Graham; I can't! I can't!"

"Puddings and lamps . . . surely one of the minor evils of the war is the abundance of bad metaphor to which it can give rise even in this picked assembly!"

Burnett enquired seriously: "Nothing amiss with the soil of Sussex, is there, Miss Gurney, that you should abandon it? We like you when you're agricultural . . . you influenced me to start growing mignonette in a window-box, once."

"You don't understand—I had to express myself about war—war in the generic sense. The inner psychology of war always remains the same, whether it's York and Lancaster—North and South America—the Assyrians and the Babylonians—or the Allies and the Huns. There's not a problem connected with the war which can be raised now, which could not have been equally contended in any one of those campaigns."

"Thousands, Mona."

"Not one, Ran—in its underlying human sub-

stance. I'm not referring to alterations in the method of warfare ; naturally these are subject to periodic changes——"

"And the human problems are dependent on these changes." He looked round for his hat : "'Books and the War'! It's been a most illuminating discussion. Patricia, you're dining with me in half an hour, and don't forget it."

"Oh, Miss O'Neill, you must spare me an evening soon, away from all these talkative men ; won't you ?" Mona Gurney was not alone in always calling Pat by the name under which she wrote. They were all liable to forget, at Leslie Campbell's, that she was the wife of Gareth Temple.

"Not this side of Christmas, Miss Gurney, unless you cross the Channel. I'm off again to-night. But do send me a copy of the new book, if it comes out in the autumn. Just to remind me of this past hour——"

"Of which the summing-up——"

"No, Ran—No!" they all cried in chorus. But unperturbedly sententious, Wyman went on : ". . . is this : that the underlying motive power for the continual and increasing eruption of war literature, in spite of discouragement and difficulties, is neither impertinence, gold-greed, nor public demand ; but rather the fact that each person feels urgently the necessity somehow to identify himself with the war, for fear of being stranded for ever upon its outer rim. Expression is one way of connection——"

"*No.*"

It was Gareth who in a low voice had contradicted; though till the rest of the company turned and stared at him in some surprise at his unwonted contribution to the argument, he was not sure if he had spoken aloud the negative shouted by his soul.

Carr said, after a pause, remembering vaguely that he had been confidant to rather a queer outburst from the reader, some years ago: "Why 'no,' Temple? You're qualified to put us all right on the subject; you're in the thick of it here, while we've been scampering about the globe."

"'The thick of it' is hardly in a publisher's office," Gareth retorted bitterly, though the other man's remark had been made without any subintention to hurt. "It's the 'thin of it'—the war in words—you never grope through them to the realities going on beyond. Words that muffle suffering till it reaches here beautiful—poignant—noble—crude—restrained—oh, as anything but itself! First the war books, and then criticism of the books, and criticism of the criticism . . . how are we—how am I to get past that to the very beat of the war? . . . The very beat of the war—that's only a phrase too—I don't know what it signifies, when I come to think about it. But expression is *not* connection. Those like you—and you—and you——" His look roamed from Carr to Wyman, rested an instant on young Burnett's drawn thin face—avoided Patricia altogether—"who have fought in the war, can you be identified with it any closer by . . . writing about it?" He came to a halt; experienced a queer satisfaction in the knowledge that for once they were all listening to him

intently . . . then, in desperate realization that even now he was only talking about talk, rushed on to achievement of his purpose: "I intend to leave here—resign my job as reader. I can't stand it any longer, Mr. Campbell; I want things straight from the source . . . it's indecent to feel as heroic as I do after reading a good war-novel . . . to respond as I do to a mere clump of words. Do you remember, at the very beginning of hostilities, when the message came through: 'The Black Watch is cut to pieces!'—I've never forgotten that—the stern sombre ring of it. . . . I'd repeat it, and feel my face growing stern and sombre. It was all in the sound; just as bad if it had been the Second Middlesex . . . but not to me. I can't get beneath the covers. Suvla Bay—that's exciting too . . . though hardly to you and me in quite the same way, Burnett. I don't suppose the name matters much to you. Suvla Bay. . . .

And when the war is over, I shall be left with a fistful of second-hand quotations. Stranded on the outer rim. If I stop here, reading about it, hearing about it. Here—where the best emotion the Great War has to give me is a thrill out of someone else's book—and the worst thing it can do to me is to spoil the chances of my own. . . ."

He walked blindly from the room. On the threshold the conviction was still upon him that he had been eloquent. Half-way down the flight of stairs, he wondered if he had made a complete fool of himself. Already it occurred to him that after all Campbell might not take seriously his notice to resign his job. Although certainly it was meant

seriously. But the embers of feeling of the past two years had blazed up and burnt themselves out in speech. . . . And now his only desire was to ascertain how his outburst had impressed Patricia. He stood stock-still, one hand gripping the iron balustrade rail . . . listened intently. He had left the door ajar . . . and was aware that Campbell had just said something—he could not catch what. Then clear and careless, came Pat's reply:

"Ah, but he'll be back in a day or two, Mr. Campbell. Dear old Gareth—his intentions are sincere, but rather collapsible!"

. . . Gareth went on, down the stairs, and into the street.

Pat knew.

CHAPTER IV

HE did not go back to Leslie Campbell's after two or three days. He went back after a fortnight. . . .

For one tensely expectant week, he waited for England to become aware of the fact that he was now definitely free to take up any war work it might have been holding in reserve for him. A phrase in poster use became part of his mental equipment—he was ready to do his bit—eager to do his bit—surely to the nation might be left the minor responsibility of finding him the bit to do. Most people, he conjectured hazily, "dropped into something" by invitation; a friend "in the swim"; a chance encounter with another friend who "tipped them the wink." And thus, by slang and by haphazard, the great ship Organization was manned, and launched, to be tested in strange and stormy seas.

Pending his new official appointment, Gareth made of his nights a feverish inferno by conjuring up a series of horror-stricken predicaments in which he might find himself involved in every fresh employment that his fancy selected as probable to materialize on the following day. Suppose he were given a job for which he was totally incapable, and they did not believe his

protestations, and he bungled it—with disastrous public consequences. Or suppose, misled by the quiet strength of his personality, they put him in a position of authority—he who could never master the secret of dealing with subordinates . . . and suppose these noticed his lack of confidence, mocked his waverings, flouted his commands; suppose he were told to perform some important mission, and it were taken for granted that he knew more than he did, and he did not fully understand his instructions, and dared not ask further questions; suppose . . .

He had been too long in the sheltered routine of Leslie Campbell's, not to torment himself with the dread of exposure to the awful unknown.

But still, there was a thrill and a sweetness in the daylight thought that he was doing war work at last!

And at last the long droning summer days of idleness and boredom convinced him that he was doing nothing of the sort. There was really and actually not much open to a man of forty-three, well over age for the Conscription Act, both shy and contemptuous of home service or the special constable badge, and not sufficiently One of Them, in the generic sense of the phrase, to be swung aloft by the crane of influence and lowered into exactly the right place.

He discovered there were Labour Bureaux, where one might put down one's marketable assets. What were his marketable assets? Gareth spent a whole night chasing these elusive qualities and trying to reduce them to a clear statement.

"I should like a job in the Censorship," he decided finally. And left it at that.

He had put down his name on the Civil Service list, and was told that he would hear from them in due course. But though the rumour was current that men were badly wanted to replace those who had been called up, yet beyond sending him a paper to fill up with details of age, citizenship, etc., the administration seemed to have successfully pigeon-holed his application. He was glad of their forgetfulness; having stood for a moment outside one of the big offices, quailing from the prospect of being absorbed and lost among these hundreds of drab little men scurrying out of the building for their hour of lunch and relaxation. Too humble to deem himself fit for anything more splendid than this, he was still too much the dreamer to accept the belief that symbolically to bear a banner in the great Crusade could be reduced actually to such humdrum insignificance.

And he missed the world of books. Ever more and more he missed it. That, after all, was the atmosphere he best understood, where words stood for deeds, and the importance of words for the importance of deeds; where all life was imprisoned by language, translated into style, shut between covers. . . . For nineteen years he had been a reader . . . two weeks astray on the hustling pavements were enough to make him regard the dim little offices off Covent Garden as precious sanctuary.

So he went back.

Leslie Campbell readily accepted his stumbling explanations of his odd behaviour a fortnight ago. He had not been well—the strain of the war—nerves out of order; and then the culminating anxiety of his wife's departure that night for Flanders. . . . "It seems worse when they return, and then go out again, doesn't it, sir?"

Campbell quite understood. He was only too glad of this reinstallation of a person on whom he could rely; eager as he was to devote most of his own time to his labours on the Commissariat. Alexander was dead; and Guy Burnett not yet well enough to take up the partnership. . . . Gareth's departure from the firm had been a definite nuisance. "He's no' indeespensable," reflected Campbell, "but time meks of a man a vary useful habit!"

Gareth walked slowly down the Strand, haunted by a queer echo of his own voice as it had recently spoken, only transposed to a higher shriller key. "The strain of the war . . . my nerves are out of order . . . and then my husband off to-night for the Front." So might a woman have offered excuse for an outburst of hysteria. So might a woman be placed, with the man she loved on the eve of departure. So might a woman feel about the war, as he had been feeling all the while . . . his vague half-splendid, half-pitiful dreams; his stifled longing to have the right, right of sex, maybe—to play the passive sacrificial part unquestioned and unashamed. . . .

He butted full into a figure standing stockstill, engrossed in the open flapping sheets of an even-

ing paper. At the force of the impact she turned —and he broke off his apologies.

"Kathleen!"

She showed no surprise at the encounter. And indeed, it was curious that this should be their first accidental meeting since she had bidden him a curt good-bye in the dining-room of Pacific Villa.

"Have you seen this?" she asked directly, pointing to a column in the paper, that dealt with a brilliant and successful feat on the part of two British airmen in France, in combat with a number of enemy aeroplanes sent up to prevent them from obtaining photographs of a very important section of trench. Both pilot and observer were recommended for the D.S.O.: Lieutenant Frank Morton and Captain Napier Kirby. . . .

Gareth looked at Kathleen; her eyes were soft and shining; her mouth tremulous.

"Only very slightly wounded, they say. But he was always a reckless idiot!" with a half-laugh of tenderness that held a sheer girlish quality. Then suddenly she seemed to realize Gareth, and her face altered to its remembered harshness.

"Why didn't you let me go with him, that time? If you had . . . he would be mine now—now that . . ."

Gareth replied: "Yes, but I was too unhappy; somebody had got in first with the theme of my book."

"Somebody? Who?"

"Patricia."

"Before you met her?"

"Yes."

She brooded a moment on this. The passers-by jostled their standing figures impatiently.

"I read a novel of yours; in 1914, wasn't it? But hers——"

"She gave it up for mine."

"Oh. . . . Yes, she would. I daresay hers was a good deal better."

He repeated: "A good deal better."

"Where is your wife now?"

"In Flanders. With the Ambulance Corps. She has been out since the beginning."

Kathleen's ironic smile comprehended and epitomized his entire married life, its failure and the causes for its failure; nay, went still further back, and assumed a triumphant intention on her own part that he should have undergone this second and more poignant disillusion.

"We're in the way here. Good-bye."

He overtook her, and walked by her side towards Trafalgar Square.

"One minute. You've told me nothing about yourself."

"Touching display of interest!"

"Pat might have said that," he mused dispassionately.

She slightly lifted her brows. "Surely there can be no resemblance between Patricia and myself?"

"You are being a little bit ungenerous," said the man, gently enough. "Lulu Collins told me you held a very responsible post in a high-explosive factory; do you like the work?"

"Yes. It's all-absorbing, which is the main thing. I was meant for tough employment, I think; it strengthens my sinews. I'm only in London for the day, sent down to interview the Minister of Munitions. What are you doing? Still stuck with Leslie Campbell?"

"I gave him notice a fortnight ago," carefully adhering to the truth. Then: "I'm going out to Flanders in a few days, as a free lance-journalist."

"Is that allowed?"

"There are ways and means of squaring people—influence . . ." said Gareth Temple.

"You'll meet with difficulties."

"I shall be killed."

The quiet certainty of his tones attracted her notice. "Do you want to die?"

He answered with seeming inconsequence: "This war wasn't made for the little people. It's absurd to suppose that a big thing can inflate our natures to correspond. We remain little people hopelessly out of scale with the big thing, instead of little people comfortably tucked up with little things. It's rather unfair—if the war hadn't happened, we need never have been found out. Millions of little people have lived honoured, respected, admired even, because their luck has never sent a European conflict to test them."

It was queer to be confiding thus in Kathleen. But she stimulated him . . . as she had always done; she and her like. The sudden startling resolve of the past few moments, startling even to himself, startlingly clear and formulated, was

entirely resultant upon her presence; the keen ring of her voice, her aloof walk, sombre hawk's face, and thin eyebrows like curved black scimitars. Spiritually and actually she was worn by her own tempestuous impatience to the finest possible edge. Patricia would one day be like this. He continued to walk beside Kathleen, because of the acute thrill of those moments when she reminded him of Patricia. . . . And he continued word-spinning in a dizzy triumphant exultation at the ease with which the whole theme of his life was unrolling itself into a final pageantry of speech. He supposed there must be an uncanny finality about this indulgence accorded him in his favourite pastime, since never before had he been able to express himself unhindered by the drag of self-deception. No doubt but that Kathleen was amazed to silence at his power to exhibit himself so stripped of all illusion; he who had always been supremely a figure of illusions. He would amaze her yet more. Tingling with a strange excitement, he went on:

"You were my first love, Kathleen; and Patricia my last. And you were the overture to Patricia, as she was the echo to you. No-one in between. Except a dream of the girl I would love to have loved . . . weaker than myself, frail and peaceful, a cool shadow-world . . . and she would have relied on my strength . . . the typical maiden to a knight. . . . I dreamt of her when I was a boy, reading the 'Idylls of the King,' on the hearthrug in the parlour above the shop. . . . Well—I dream of her still. And I daresay if we

met she could not awaken a single throb in me. Just because I'm a woman-soul myself, Kathleen, I was fated to be magnetically attracted again and again by the bolder and more vital nature in your sex; the strong nature that could not fail to make me miserable directly on finding me out. That other girl—my ideal—she would have admired me. You never admired me, did you, Kathleen?" a fleeting whimsicality in the smile he bestowed on her. "Nor did Patricia . . . Patricia . . .

"I've never been able to impress Patricia. That's why I'm setting off for Flanders now. It was just an impulse that you inspired. . . . I believe the right one at last. Usually I play about too long with the pretty word-rhythms and word-patterns, and the act comes too late for effect. But not this time. This time I'm leaving out the talk. I shall meet her somewhere in the chaos over there—one does meet people strangely; why, you were only in London for one day! And I shall meet my death, too, somehow, in the chaos over there . . . because it's the inevitable end of my round adventure."

There was a slight tinge of weariness in his companion's tone, as she asked: "*Do* people meet with their inevitable ends? Surely life is haphazard and death inconsequent?"

He shook his head. "You say you have read my book? I believe every life is formed as a complete wheel, of which the end closes up with the start, and the axis is some special adventure. Only so few are conscious of the shape . . . they

assume that adventure must of necessity be joyous adventure—loud clarion-calls—the D.S.O. . . . My round adventure was to be superfluous—the onlooker at other people's adventures—never One of Them. . . . I've felt it, always. Now I can see it—and give in. The Great War . . . there's no room for superfluous people in the Great War. The best way they can fulfil themselves is by self-effacement . . . self-removal. I haven't the pluck for suicide, Kathleen; but I have faith in my round adventure—and I'm going to Flanders, to Patricia, where my faith will prove itself . . . some significant completion of the whole. Perhaps even I may be allowed in death what wasn't part of the scheme of life: to make an impression on the woman I love. Childish, I know—but . . . yes, I think the Draughtsman will allow that. He has an excellent gift for irony."

"I must leave you here," said Kathleen abruptly.

They stood at the corner of Whitehall. She held out her hand.

"Good-bye."

Her inner thought was: "And I stood this sort of thing for sixteen years . . ."

"Good-bye," he said absently; "when shall I see you again?" . . . and let fall her hand and strolled away, his eyes still misty with visions.

About fifty seconds after he had left her side, a shattering explosion was heard in the neighbourhood of Trafalgar Square. An apparently friendly aeroplane had dropped a couple of random bombs; and then, soaring from the swoop, disappeared

among the clouds. One of the bombs rolled harmlessly off the slate roof of an outhouse and did no mischief. The other wounded a cat, damaged an outjutting iron balcony, and killed Gareth Temple. A newspaper paragraph, reporting the incident the following day, remarked that the machine must have been one of our own which had fallen into German hands. "After releasing the bombs, the enemy was able to effect an escape. Fortunately the casualties were insignificant."

THE END

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